



GIRLS ACTIVIST YOUTH ORGANISATION

GAYO ANNUAL PROGRAM REPORT

2024 ANNUAL MANAGEMENT REPORT



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1. ORGANISATION OVERVIEW

STATEMENT FROM THE BOARD CHAIR

It is an honor to present this 2024 Annual Report, a testament to the tireless efforts of our staff, community partners, and supporters. As I reflect on the year, I am reminded of Paulo Freire's words: "The future isn't something hidden in a corner. The future is something we build in the present."

This year, GAYO's work affirmed that the seeds we plant today in education, health, and advocacy do indeed shape tomorrow. From strengthening literacy in primary schools to empowering adolescent girls with information on sexual and reproductive health, we have seen young people step into spaces of leadership, resilience, and transformation.



MEREENA JOHN
BOARD CHAIR

What has inspired me most is the collective spirit behind these achievements. Parents, teachers, traditional leaders, and young champions have stood side by side with us to keep girls in school, fight harmful practices, and demand inclusive policies. The results shared in this report are not merely numbers; they are stories of restored hope, redefined futures, and communities choosing progress.

On behalf of the Board, I extend our deepest gratitude to all our partners and supporters. Your trust enables GAYO to pursue lasting solutions to the challenges facing young people in Malawi and beyond. Together, we are not just planning for a better future we are building it.

A WORD FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Looking back at 2024, I am humbled by the resilience of the young people and communities we serve. This year, GAYO implemented programs that touched lives in education, health, and advocacy programs that reminded us why long-term investment in youth matters.

I recall a young woman who once benefited from our bursary program and who, in 2024, wrote back to us as a professional eager to give back. Her story, like many others, underscores that while education may take time to show results, its impact is permanent and transformative. It is these outcomes that give meaning to our work.

Through initiatives like the TiKuMA Project, we saw learner councils revitalize school governance, giving students a voice in their education. In health, our SRHR programs engaged chiefs, faith leaders, and youth champions to challenge harmful norms and ensure access to services. In advocacy, the GEAR project strengthened youth voices in national dialogues, ensuring that the needs of adolescent girls and young women are represented in policy spaces.



Richard Batch
Executive Director

None of this would have been possible without the dedication of our staff, the trust of our partners, and the generosity of our supporters. To each of you, I say thank you. The challenges facing our nation are real, but so too is the fire of possibility within our youth. As Yeats once said, "Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire." That fire is burning, and together, we will ensure it never goes out.

GAYO

WHO WE ARE

Gayo is a leading non-profit organization in Malawi, dedicated to empowering girls, young women and youths. Established in 2007 as a youth club and registered in 2016 as non-profit making organization under the board of trustees. Gayo champions girls, young women and youth rights through research, development, entrepreneurship, and community engagement, utilizing ICT and traditional communication methods. Gayo advocates for girls', young women and youths education, promotes self-reliance, and works on projects addressing health, education, livelihoods, information communication technology, child right government, fostering a conducive environment where girls, young women and youths can thrive and contribute to a just and equitable society



VISION

GAYO aspires a Malawi where all girls young women and youths are empowered, educated, self reliant, living in good health, become a catalyst for social economic development.



GAYO works to empower girls young women and youths in Malawi through education, health, advocacy, economic empowerment and access to essential services, fostering self reliance and contributing to a just and equitable society



VALUES

Youth Involvement, Empowerment, Transparent and Accountability Equity, Respect to human rights, Gender Sensitive, Integrity & Collaboration

2. CONTEXT ANALYSIS

The Malawi Economic Monitor (MEM) provides an in-depth analysis of Malawi's current economic landscape, highlighting key macroeconomic trends, policy developments, and structural challenges. The latest edition notes that Malawi's economy is facing significant vulnerabilities, including low growth, high inflation, and increasing fiscal and external imbalances. The World Bank estimates that Malawi's GDP grew by only 1.8% in 2024, a downward revision from the 2.0% growth projected in April 2024.

The report highlights the impact of the El Niño-induced drought on Malawi's agricultural output, which is expected to have contracted by 2.0% in 2024. Food insecurity remains a major concern, with maize output falling short of domestic consumption requirements. The World Bank notes that Malawi has one of the lowest rates of electricity access among comparable countries, but the Mpatamanga Hydropower Storage Project (MHSP) is expected to boost electricity production and have a positive impact on the economy.

The MEM asserts that the cost of inaction is rising, and implementing stabilization and adjustment reforms could enable the Malawian economy to achieve higher growth rates over the next five years. The report also notes that developing Malawi's mining sector could attract foreign investment, create jobs, and stimulate economic growth. The Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) expects inflation to slow down and reach 22.0% by the end of 2025, due to favorable base effects and a supportive monetary policy stance.

Different organizations have varying projections for Malawi's inflation rate in 2025. The World Bank projects an annual average inflation rate of 27.3%, while the Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) expects inflation to remain elevated at an average of 28.3%. Oxford Economics and the IMF have different projections, with Oxford Economics expecting food price inflation to remain elevated in the first half of 2025 and the IMF projecting an inflation rate of 15.3% due to declining food prices.

2. SUMMARY OF THE ACHIEVEMENTS

Narrative of the Education Program

GAYO's commitment to education is to ensure all girls, boys and young complete free, equitable and quality early childhood development and primary school. The program thematically focuses on three components namely Literacy promotion, Early Childhood Development, and Information Communication Technology and entrepreneurship. In literacy promotion, the program manifests in a multifaceted approach, encompassing quality and inclusive education aiming at;

- Improving cognitive ability of the learners,
- Improving the quality and effectiveness of teaching,
- Increasing community engagement in education intervention,
- Increasing learning, teaching environment and climate impact on learning process.

During the reporting period the program implemented TikuMa project.

TIKUMA PROJECTS

Project Performance

Outcome 3.3: Improved leadership and governance systems at school, district, and national levels to promote quality basic education in a safe, supportive, participatory, and inclusive environment

The project strengthened leadership and governance systems in 65 schools by establishing and reactivating learner councils, training 1,020 council members to promote student participation and advocacy. Additionally, the project capacitated Parent Teacher Associations and School Management Committees through training and needs assessments, promoting inclusive practices, gender equality, and advocacy for children's rights to create a supportive and inclusive environment for all students.

Output 3.3.1 Strengthened Child Participation to promote quality inclusive basic education

The project aimed to establish and reactivate 65 learner councils in schools to promote student participation and advocacy. Initially, only one council existed but was non-functional; the program successfully established 64 new councils and revamped the existing one. The councils were formed through a democratic process with a focus on gender representation and inclusivity.

Trained council members addressed issues like menstrual hygiene, gender-based violence, and access to education. The program also developed a training package and trained 1,020 council members (510 males, 510 females) to empower them as agents of change, enabling them to influence school decisions and address concerns affecting their education and well-being.

Output 3.3.2 School leadership and governance structures, teachers (PTA), learners (LCs), and district systems strengthened to promote quality basic education in a safe, supportive, participatory, and inclusive environment

The project aimed to establish functional Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) and School Management Committees (SMCs) in 65 schools. Although all schools had PTAs and SMCs, they were non-functional due to lack of capacity building. The program supported the District Education Office in mapping governance

Narrative of Health Program

GAYO’s commitment to health and nutrition prioritizes on improvement of the wellbeing of girls, youths and young women through improving healthcare delivery, access to sustainable and safe water supply, and improvement of access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) services and education. In order to improve access to essential healthcare services for girls and youth in underserved communities. The program recognize that teen mothers face a lot of maternal challenges. The program conducts awareness meetings on male participation in maternal and new born care where appropriate new born and children feeding practices have improved. Health Program has two project; Enhancing Reproductive Health Outcome Project and Sexual Education for transformation.

ENHANCING REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH OUTCOME PROJECT

Project Performance

Outcome 1: Increase individual awareness of SRHR as a human right

structures, conducting needs assessments, and identifying gaps. Key findings included lack of training, limited resources, and insufficient community engagement. The program promoted gender equality and trained 231 PTA and SMC members (125 males, 85 females) on their roles, responsibilities, and national education policies.

The training enhanced the capacity of governance structures to support school management and improve educational outcomes. It promoted inclusive practices, addressing gender-specific issues, child participation, and disability inclusion. PTAs and SMCs demonstrated improved awareness of gender equality and the importance of advocacy for children’s rights. The program fostered a culture of empathy, collaboration, and advocacy, aiming to create a more supportive and inclusive environment for all students. Relevant education policies were disseminated, and stakeholders were oriented on their roles and responsibilities.

The project in TA Malemia has achieved a significant positive shift in promoting Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) services, including safe abortion. Following proper orientation, 20 tertiary institution students and 21 service providers were educated on SRHR services as a human right, while 68 chiefs participated in community dialogues facilitated by youth champions and began actively engaging in SRHR advocacy. As a result, community leaders, health staff, faith leaders, and youth leaders are now taking a leading role in providing and advocating for SRHR services and disseminating information to youth.

The project established a youth space to discuss SRHR as human rights and created awareness through radio programs and media articles. Two radio programs generated positive engagement, with 17 SMS responses (12 from women, 5 from males) from listeners in 5 districts. Additionally, 9 journalists (7 males, 2 females) were trained to report on SRHR issues, resulting in 5 media articles highlighting SRHR as a human right. The project’s

report on SRHR issues, resulting in 5 media articles highlighting SRHR as a human right. The project’s efforts have empowered youths to advocate for safe abortion practices and legislation, and promoted public awareness through responsible media coverage.

Outcome 2: Increase access to SRHR resources, information, and services

The project successfully reached 603 youths through community mobilization and sports activities, providing a wide range of SRHR services, including HIV testing, family planning, and contraceptive counseling. The project also conduct interface meeting attended by 30 students, medical experts, legal experts, and lecturers improved coordination between SRHR service providers and students, enabling them to access SRHR resources from clinics. This development is expected to reduce the need for post-abortion care, which currently stands at 768 cases in Zomba DHO, with 444 cases involving individuals aged 15-24.

Outcome 3: Transformed social norms

In TA Malemia, 15 youths were trained on SRHR information, psychosocial support, and community dialogue facilitation. These youth champions have conducted 11 SRHR community dialogues, reaching 304 participants (138 males, 166 females) and 68 community faith leaders. The dialogues challenged harmful social and cultural practices, beliefs, and myths about SRHR, including safe abortion.

As a result of these efforts, the project received five cases of young women seeking safe abortion care, and they were referred to appropriate service providers. The project also produced a video documentary capturing community leaders’ perceptions on unsafe abortion and SRHR access. The trained youths are now providing psychosocial support, counseling, and referral services to their peers, promoting comprehensive SRHR information and support.

II. Sexual Education for Transformation Project (SET)

During the reporting period, various interventions reached a total of 2493 beneficiaries (1088 male, 1405 female). These interventions included training 25 CSOs on advocacy strategies and SRHR frameworks, conducting a country-level college student dialogue

with 30 students, and orienting 151 youths on SRHR advocacy. Additionally, 621 youths accessed SRHR services, 753 youths participated in SRHR radio programs, and 488 people received SRHR messages during road shows, games, and theatre.

Cumulatively, since the project’s start, a total of 7834 beneficiaries (2947 male, 4887 female) have been reached. The project’s interventions have included community dialogues, quarterly learning cycle meetings, SRHR youth conferences, and research indabas, among others. The project continues to make progress in advancing SRHR outcomes for youths and communities in Malawi.

Project summary

The overall goal of the coalition is to ensure inclusive and equitable access to quality education by adolescent girls and young women in rural and farming communities in Southern Africa. The GEAR Alliance jointly pursues the targets of SDG 4 and SDG 5 using the argument that one way of ending gender inequalities and inequities is to ensure that girls and young women have access to education. The alliance is alive to the reality that girls in rural and farming communities are excluded from accessing education due to the absence of CSE, menstrual health inadequacies, sexual violence and child marriages amongst other SRH infirmities. To this end, girls’ enjoyment of SRH rights is a critical enabler of their dignity and wellbeing

The SET project seeks to create a movement of youth-serving organizations in Southern Africa that advocates for access to SRH services by adolescent girls and young women in rural communities. The problem is that adolescents and young women in rural communities do not have access to SRH services and have limited exposure to CSE leading to SRH infirmities such as poor menstrual hygiene, unplanned pregnancies, unsafe abortion and exposure to sexual violence.

The main outcome of the SET project shall be a strong movement of youth organizations in Southern Africa with the ability to conduct evidence-based SRH advocacy for governments to service and prioritize the SRH needs of adolescent girls and young women in rural communities. The project interventions shall prioritize as entry points to accessing SRH services by girls the availability of CSE and youth-friendly SRH services. The interventions shall be designed around the 4 pillars of capacity building, advocacy, linking and learning

The SET objective is to strengthen the capacities of community-based youth led organizations in the use of evidence in SRH advocacy. The project also enhances the participation of community-based youth focused organizations in SRH coordination and review

mechanisms at national and regional levels. In addition, the project enhances intra and inter country peer learning amongst community-based youth focused CSOs programming in SRH. Another objective of SET is to increase the visibility of SRH messages countering opposition on the need to roll out CSE for young people in Southern Africa.

Project Performance

Outcome 1: Improved participation of GEAR alliance members in national and transnational SRHR advocacy platforms

Output 1.1: Improved capacity of GEAR alliance members to identify national and transnational advocacy platforms

The Sexual Education for Transformation (SET) project has significantly strengthened GAYO’s capacity in advocacy, resource mobilization, and organization development. Through visits, online meetings, and training with lead partner SAYWHAT, GAYO acquired new skills in proposal writing and resource mobilization, resulting in an increase from 3 to 8 projects. GAYO’s programming has expanded to include sexual reproductive health and comprehensive sexual education, securing 2 additional SRHR projects. GAYO has also evolved into a national advocacy organization, participating in international conferences, and occupying key roles in district and national networks, while improving its internal systems and gaining donor trust through risk management checks, audits, and staff professionalism development.

Output 1.2: Enhanced capacity of boundary partners in advocacy

Empowered by the SET project, GAYO built capacity of various stakeholders in advocacy and SRHR. GAYO trained 25 CSOs in Mchinji on advocacy strategies and SRHR frameworks, enabling them to advocate for implementation of SRHR policies. At the national level, GAYO built capacity of 152 youths on advocacy strategies and SRHR frameworks during the Ministerial Pre-Budget Consultation with the youth constituency. At the community level, GAYO trained 16 community stakeholders and 6 staff members on best SRHR implementation practices through Quarterly learning cycle meetings. The stakeholders shared experiences, challenges, and best practices, and provided recommendations to improve SRHR implementation, including standardized reporting, expanding SRHR

champions, and regular SRHR campaigns. The meetings also highlighted the need for collaboration between religious leaders and SRHR champions, and for SRHR services to be available during community outreach.

Output 1.3: Improved capacity of young people to participate in advocacy

In T/A Kapondo, Mchinji, 150 community members (69 female, 81 male) understand issues like early marriage, SGBV, MHM, STIs, and ANC, and can recognize myths surrounding these topics. This is thanks to community dialogues facilitated by SRHR community champions, who were initially 20 trained youths (10 male, 10 female). Later, GAYO trained 25 additional young women from the Web for Life movement, increasing the total number of champions to 45, to expand SRHR services to schools and semi-urban areas. These champions are now sensitizing their community on the importance of supporting SRHR interventions.

Output 1.4 Enhanced capacity of CSOs to conduct advocacy

As chair of Mchinji district Civil Society Organization, GAYO coordinated the development of a district SRHR learning and collaboration plan, bringing together 25 CSOs and 5 government stakeholders. This plan promotes synergy, cost sharing, and skill sharing among partners, guiding joint SRHR interventions in Mchinji district.

Output 1.5 Increased knowledge of CSOs in national and transnational SRHR policies and frameworks

GAYO staff were trained in advocacy strategies and SRHR frameworks in Africa, enabling them to organize a country-level SRHR college interface meeting with 30 students (23 females, 7 males) from various colleges. The dialogue focused on SRHR implementation in colleges and transnational frameworks, equipping students with knowledge of SRHR services, referral centers, and myth clarification. Additionally, 84 youths (69 females, 15 males) expressed their experiences and concerns to legislators on SRHR challenges due to poor framework implementation

A national youth conference on SRHR was organized by CYECE in collaboration with GAYO, bringing together various national stakeholders, including young people, SRHR professionals, and NGOs. The conference theme was “Breaking barriers, bridging gaps, building futures in adolescent and youth SRHR”. Participants made resolutions, including establishing a system to hold law enforcement accountable on SGBV cases, making government departments more youth-friendly, and providing youth-friendly health services with counselors and referrals

A country-level dialogue and research indaba was also organized, attended by 101 youths and stakeholders (53 male, 48 female), to evaluate the implementation of the Malawi National Youth Friendly Health Services (YFHS) Strategy 2022-2030. The dialogue concluded that YFHS in Malawi faces notable challenges, including inconvenient hours, negative provider attitudes, and insufficient skills among workers, and recommended improved service quality, reduced stigma, and greater awareness to ensure better access for young people.

Outcome 2: Improved gender equality in access to SRHR services among young people

Output 2.1 Improved young people’s knowledge on SRHR issues

Students from various colleges in Domasi are now accessing SRHR resources, including safe abortion care and contraceptives, thanks to an interface meeting organized by GAYO that brought together students, legal and health experts, and lecturers. Peer educators in each college collect contraceptives from nearby clinics and share them with fellow students, and students are discussing SRHR challenges and solutions. As a result, Zomba DHO reports a significant increase in students aged 15-24 receiving contraceptives, from 15 in 2023 to 231 by December 2024, which is expected to reduce the need for post-abortion care, currently at 768 cases, with 444 involving individuals aged 15-24.

Output 2.2 Greater diversity and choices of SRHR services provided in GEAR alliance countries.

Through the SET project, the government provided 5 SRHR services to 621 youths (387 female, 234 male) in the reporting period, including HIV testing (147), STI services (1), SRHR counseling (315), family planning (33), and oral quick/safe test (125). This was achieved through an SRHR fair with extensive community mobilization and sports activities, offering a wide range of SRHR services, including contraceptive counseling, STI/HIV testing, pregnancy testing, post-abortion care, and comprehensive sexuality education.

Outcome 3: Changes in laws adopted by the 5 GEAR alliance countries into their policies as a result of the project’s advocacy efforts.

Output 3.2: Improved capacity of GEAR alliance partners to conduct research.

GAYO and University of Carolina (UNC) built capacity of 3 youths on SRHR research, who then presented their studies to 101 (53 male, 48 female) youths and stakeholders at a policy dialogue and research indaba. The studies revealed significant knowledge gaps and misconceptions about modern contraceptives among students (with a higher percentage of female students unaware compared to males), negative perceptions of contraceptive use among adolescents due to stigma, myths, and cultural beliefs, and challenges accessing SRHR services, including lack of knowledge (45.8% of 60 participants) and long distances to health facilities (38% of participants). The researchers recommended interventions like peer discussions, targeted campaigns, and accessible youth-friendly health services to improve SRHR outcomes.

Output 3.3: Increased public awareness and knowledge on SRHR.

The project reached 753 youths (430 female, 323 male) with SRHR messages through radio programs, which generated positive audience engagement, including 78 SMS responses and 79 calls on YONECO FM radio, and 51 SMS responses and 50 calls on Mudziwathu Radio. The radio programs, integrated with Facebook live streaming, reached a total of 753 youths, with 464 (279 female, 185 male) participating in YONECO radio program and 289 (151 female, 138 male) in Mudziwathu radio program. Additionally, GAYO conducted road shows, games, and theatre, reaching 448 people (275 male, 173 female) with SRHR messages in preparation for a service fair. The project helped youths overcome hesitation to discuss SRHR services and express their needs and concerns.

Narrative of advocacy Program

GAYO’s advocacy program focuses on three main areas: Gender Justice, Child Protection, and Policy Implementation. Under Gender Justice, the program aims to empower youth, girls, and women to exercise their rights, reduce GBV, improve access to justice, and promote economic empowerment. The Child Protection framework empowers adolescent children to make informed decisions, promotes safe and inclusive environments, strengthens systems to prevent child marriage and violence, and enhances law enforcement. The Policy Advocacy program promotes CSO engagement in education review processes, improves access to education and health for girls and women, ensures accountability and fosters strong CSO

movements in Malawi and southern Africa. Advocacy Program has two project; Girls Education Advocacy in the Region (GEAR) and Rusa Child protection Sponsorship Project.

GIRLS EDUCATION ADVOCACY IN THE REGION (GEAR)

Project Performance

During the reporting period, GAYO focused on key activities addressing education, gender equality, and empowerment. Highlights included commemorating the International Day of Education, engaging with an EOL consultant to reflect on the GEAR Project’s contributions to Education Out Loud (EOL) objectives, and holding an organizational health check with Sophia Irepu, Regional MEL Advisor, HESA RMU. Additionally, GAYO undertook initiatives such as co-creating education messages, facilitating an orientation meeting on GESD tools, participating in the National Pre- Budget Consultation Meeting, conducting a multi-stakeholder SDG dialogue in Mchinji, supporting Inclusive Quality (IQ) Education Forums, and contributing to District Education Review Technical Working Groups. The organization also emphasized Parliamentary Engagement, focusing on 2024/25 budget tracking, 2025/26 budget analysis, and position paper presentations to foster collaboration, promote inclusivity, and address systemic challenges.

Outcome 1: Increased accountability and public engagement in the education sector and processes at national and transnational levels.

Facilitate Inclusive Quality (IQ) Education Forums

GAYO organized an Inclusive Quality Education Forum with 20 participants from various stakeholders, including CSOs, line ministries, educational institutions, and students with disabilities. The forum analysed Malawi’s inclusive education policy implementation, identifying challenges and opportunities to promote equitable access to quality education for all, especially learners with disabilities. The discussion highlighted significant gaps in education access, with 40% of school-age children with disabilities out of school, and low completion rates, particularly for girls. The forum aimed to develop a position paper with actionable recommendations to address these challenges, emphasizing advocacy, capacity building, and inclusivity to ensure equitable access to quality education and promote Sustainable Development Goal implementation

Reviewing National Progress (VNR) on SDGs: A Multi-Stakeholder Dialogue for Mchinji.

A workshop on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Malawi brought together 30 stakeholders to assess progress and challenges in implementing SDGs at district and national levels. The discussion highlighted successes in education and health, but setbacks in poverty reduction and economic growth due to funding gaps and poor coordination. Participants emphasized the need for stronger coordination between CSOs, district councils, and communities to effectively localize SDG targets, and identified obstacles such as funding limitations, grassroots participation challenges, and low SDG awareness. Key recommendations included aligning SDG initiatives with local development plans, establishing district-level monitoring systems, and increasing budget allocations. Stakeholders committed to integrating action points into local development plans, advocating for increased funding, mobilizing citizen participation, and aligning efforts with national SDG frameworks. Follow-up mechanisms were established, including a working group and regular review meetings to ensure accountability and sustained progress in achieving the SDGs. The meeting successfully fostered dialogue and collaboration among diverse stakeholders, enhancing knowledge-sharing and joint problem-solving to advance SDG progress in Mchinji and beyond

International Day of Education commemoration

The International Day of Education 2025 was celebrated on January 25 at Green Hill Lodge in Mchinji District, with the theme “AI and Education: Preserving Human Agency in a World of Automation.” The event emphasized the importance of inclusive education and ensuring that technology enhances human creativity, critical thinking, and ethical judgment. The Executive Director of GAYO highlighted the potential of AI in propelling Malawi’s development goals, while stressing the need for fairness, transparency, and respect for human dignity in AI-driven decisions.

The event included breakout sessions conducted by Web for Life, where participants discussed topics related to AI and education, including personalizing learning, ethical implications, and preparing students for an AI-driven future. The discussions provided unique insights based on different levels of understanding and experience. The District Principal Education Officer and the District Commissioner for Mchinji also emphasized the potential of technology in contributing to Malawi’s development goals, while cautioning against over-reliance on AI at the expense of human cognitive development.

The participants made key note asks to the government, including introducing computer lessons in primary schools, making computer lessons compulsory, supplying adequate computers and tablets, negotiating for cheaper internet bundles, and building computer labs in every school. These asks aim to enhance access to technology and promote inclusive education in Malawi. The event fostered dialogue and collaboration among stakeholders, highlighting the importance of preserving human agency in education amidst technological advancements.

Monitoring and Evaluation Activities

Horn, East and Southern Africa (HESA) Regional Management Unit– Monitoring and Support visit to EOL Grantees in Malawi-CSEC, GAYO, ECD, FAWEMA, RoH innovated models follow up).

During the reporting period meeting was held between Sophia Irepu, Regional MEL Advisor, HESA RMU, and GAYO staff to discuss objectives related to reviewing project progress, implementation, and outcomes. The discussion covered topics such as:

- Reviewing grantee progress and addressing challenges
- Assessing innovative models and best practices
- Evaluating transnational advocacy and synergies among grantees
- Assessing intra- and inter-organizational learning processes
- Building relationships with stakeholders

The meeting concluded with recommendations for GAYO, including ensuring board approval for key committees. A report will be compiled by Sophia Irepu and sent to GAYO for action.

Orientation Meeting on GESD Tools

During the reporting Period an orientation meeting was held to provide comprehensive training on GESD tools, specifically the Social Audit Tool and Project Monitoring Checklist. These tools aim to evaluate and track project implementation, focusing on aspects such as community participation, grievance handling, and council oversight. The training equipped participants with structured methods to improve gender-responsive project delivery and social accountability. The workshop was facilitated by 18 Mchinji district stakeholders, including GAYO.

The Social Audit Tool is a comprehensive accountability mechanism that evaluates project implementation and fosters citizen participation. It assesses the establishment

and inclusivity of Project Implementation Committees, citizen participation in planning and decision-making, and service delivery. The tool examines whether projects meet their intended purposes, deliver quality services, and achieve satisfactory impact from the community’s perspective. This structured approach promotes inclusive community involvement in development initiatives and ensures accountability.

Reflection Meeting on the GEAR Project’s Contribution to Education Out Loud (EOL) Objectives

A meeting was held to evaluate the achievements and challenges of the GAYO-led Girls Education Advocacy in the Region (GEAR) Project. The project has made significant progress in increasing access to secondary education for girls from rural and marginalized communities. Key achievements include supporting girls to transition from primary to secondary school, re-enrolling girls who had dropped out, and reintegrating pregnant girls into the education system.

The project has also strengthened district education networks, facilitated greater local advocacy for girls’ education, and influenced government engagement in allocating public resources to the education sector. Additionally, GAYO collaborated with local NGOs to implement Public Expenditure Tracking on School Improvement Grants, ensuring efficient use of resources. These efforts have contributed to improving access to quality education for girls in rural areas, and the project has made notable progress in achieving the Education Out Loud (EOL) objectives.

Outcome 2: Strengthened regional collaboration, learning, advocacy, and action on education quality, and equitable access for young women from rural and farming communities

a. Cocreation of Education Message

The Girls Education Advocacy in the Region (GEAR) alliance, led by GAYO, conducted a one-day stakeholder workshop to develop advocacy messages for promoting adolescent girls and young women’s education in rural Malawi. The workshop brought together 83 participants from diverse stakeholders, including education officials, civil society organizations, and youth representatives. The objective was to co-create compelling messages to drive policy change and advocate for inclusive, equitable education systems.

The workshop focused on empowering girls to represent their own views and engage with policymakers, ensuring their voices are heard and acted upon. Participants developed key messages addressing challenges faced

faced by adolescent girls and young women in accessing education, organized under themes such as inclusive education, gender, and digital literacy. The workshop aimed to transform advocacy into meaningful change despite existing deficiencies in domestic education funding, curriculum development, and infrastructure.

b. Supporting District Education Review Technical Working Group platforms

GAYO supported and participate in the Technical Working Group comprises 70 participants, with 30 females and 40 males. All participants are aged 25 or older. The total number of members in the group is 70. The Girls Activist Youth Organization (GAYO) presented a summary of the 2022 Malawi Voluntary National Review (VNR) Report and discussed SDG progress through a PowerPoint presentation and discussions. The objectives were to showcase achievements on the United Nations General Assembly 2022 Commitments and address challenges in the education sector. GAYO highlighted that Malawi has integrated SDGs into its national development agenda, with MIP-1 being 82% aligned to SDGs. Progress is being coordinated through Pillar and Enabler Coordination Groups (PECGs) involving various stakeholders. The 2022 VNR, Malawi’s second report, highlights slow progress on most SDGs, with SDGs 3, 6, 12, and 13 on track, but notes significant concerns like persistent poverty, as 50.7% of Malawians still live below the national poverty line. Strategic interventions are necessary to achieve meaningful progress by 2030.

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) gained key insights from the Voluntary National Review (VNR) report, fostering collaboration to promote quality education, particularly for girls in rural areas. The government committed to strategies aimed at motivating teachers and girls in these communities, enhancing educational outcomes. Challenges include corruption, which hampers infrastructure development, and natural disasters like cyclones that pose significant risks to national progress. Recommendations focus on improving SDG financing mechanisms through the Joint SDG Fund, strengthening data systems for monitoring, and building capacity among institutions and CSOs to improve service delivery and governance. These steps aim to accelerate SDG implementation and address existing gaps.

Outcome 3: Improved education policies, practices and progress towards fulfilling national and international commitments on inclusive and equitable education systems for young women from

rural and farming communities in Zambia, Malawi and Zimbabwe

a. National Pre-Budget consultation Meeting

The Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs in Malawi held a pre-budget consultation meeting to gather input from stakeholders for the 2024-25 national budget. Dr. Limbani Sapato from EDUCANTS highlighted critical issues in the education sector, including inadequate access to Early Childhood Development, high dropout rates, and limited access to secondary and higher education. He proposed measures to address these challenges, such as increasing funding for education and boosting bursary programs for underprivileged students.

Other stakeholders, including the Economics Association of Malawi and GAYO, also provided input. ECAMA advocated for discontinuing double financing of maize consumers, while GAYO emphasized the role of social accountability in the education sector, advocating for transparency and stakeholder participation to improve educational outcomes. GAYO also proposed involving stakeholders in budget planning to address issues like infrastructure gaps and teacher shortages. The meeting aimed to shape a budget that addresses national priorities and fosters inclusive development.

b. Parliamentary Engagement focused on 2024/25 budget tracking and 2025/26 budget analysis.

On March 12th, 2025, GAYO, in coordination with CSEC, organized a Parliamentary Engagement focused on 2024/25 budget tracking and 2025/26 budget analysis. The activity brought together participants, including parliamentarians from various committees (Education, Budget and Finance, Social Welfare, and Health), CSO representatives, district education managers (DEMs), social media influencers, and university students, to discuss budget challenges and opportunities. The objectives were to share insights from budget analyses, address disparities in allocation and utilization, advocate for evidence-based budgeting aligned with Malawi 2063, and strengthen accountability and collaboration among stakeholders. Key outputs included actionable lobbying points for increased investment and shared presentations emphasizing the importance of education funding and Ed-Tech initiatives.

c. Documentation and presentation of position papers

GAYO facilitated the development of an Inclusive Education Policy position paper, highlighting Malawi’s progress and challenges in promoting inclusive education. Despite adopting international and national frameworks, Malawi faces significant challenges, including low school completion rates, inadequate infrastructure, and limited resources for learners with disabilities

The position paper recommends addressing these gaps through disability-friendly infrastructure, teacher training, and community engagement.

The National Inclusive Education Policy (NIEP) aims to create an equitable and inclusive education system, and key recommendations were presented to parliament during a budget cycle meeting. These recommendations include expediting the approval of the NIEP, increasing the education budget, improving learning environments, and expanding teacher training for inclusive teaching methods. Stakeholders are urged to enhance community engagement, provide targeted support, and ensure accessibility in higher education institutions to remove barriers and promote inclusive education for all learners in Malawi.

RUSA CHILD PROTECTION SPONSORSHIP PROJECT

During the reporting period, the RUSA CESP PROJECT focused on achieving its goal of sustained wellbeing for children in Traditional Authority Kapondo, Mchinji, particularly the most vulnerable and registered children. The project concentrated on three primary outcomes: enhancing monitoring and reviews of child protection plans by community duty bearers, civil society organizations, children’s clubs, and faith-based organizations; strengthening local child protection partner groups to effectively address root causes of violence against boys and girls; and promoting adolescent wellbeing through development of assets, life skills, and basic skills.

OUTCOME 1: Enhancing monitoring and reviews of child protection plan by Community duty bearers, CSOs, children’s clubs, and FBOs.

During the reporting period, GAYO strengthened inclusive feedback mechanisms for effective communication between community members and key stakeholders. The project empowered 47 community members in TA Kapondo to engage with duty bearers regarding child protection structures. A one-day rapid assessment at Chipumi Assemblies of God, facilitated by government officials, analysed root causes of child protection issues and evaluated intervention effectiveness. Additionally, the project educated 62 individuals from schools and community structures on referral protocols, gender equality, child rights, and proper use of complaint mechanisms.

OUTCOME 2: Enhancing effectively addresses root causes of violence against boys and girls by Local Child Protection partner groups

During the reporting period, the project focused

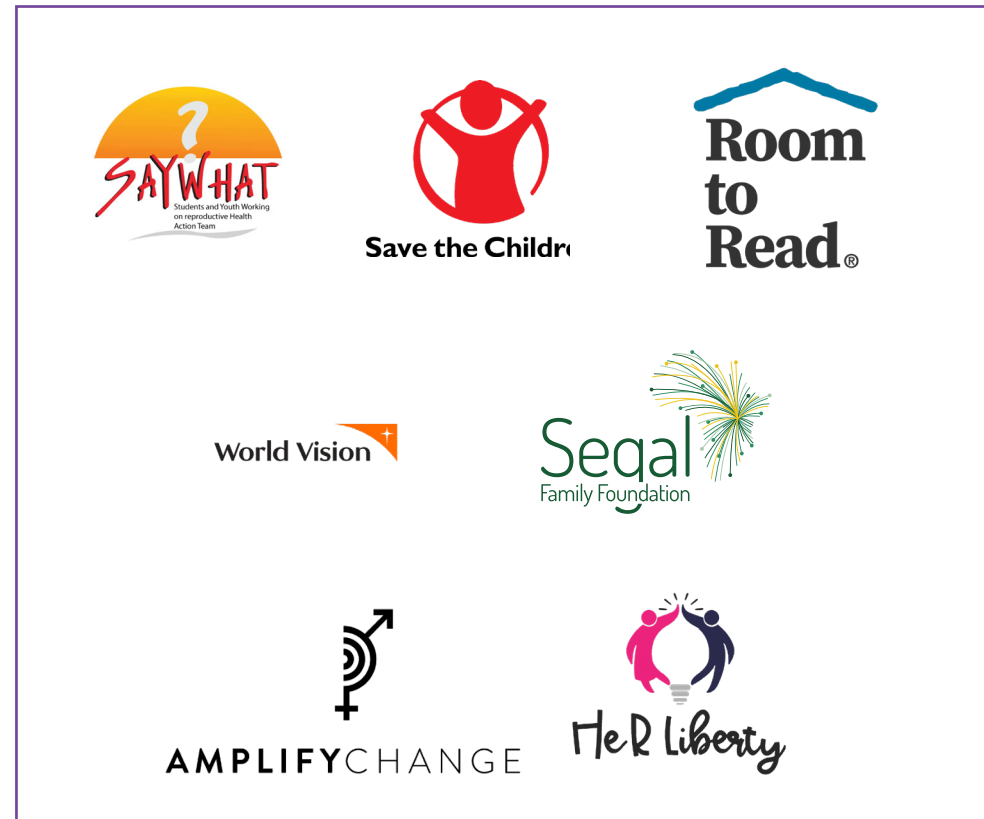
on strengthening local child protection community structures to address root causes of violence against children. The initiative documented 109 child protection cases that were properly reported, referred, or managed according to standards. These cases included 25 child marriages (19 girls, 6 boys), 28 instances of neglect (17 girls, 11 boys), 17 cases of child Labor (3 girls, 14 boys), 8 reports of physical abuse (5 girls, 3 boys), and 31 cases of gender-based violence. (Mchinji District social welfare monitoring data). The project supported 10 community child protection structures in developing new protection plans and engaged 10 churches/faith-based organizations in protection interventions. These achievements resulted from capacity building of 69 community leaders in local context analysis and training churches in channels of hope methodology to enhance case management participation. Additionally, 75 community members participated in awareness meetings on child protection policies and laws, while 48 individuals from formal and informal structures received training in incident reporting, referral mechanisms, and community case management to strengthen the overall protection system.

OUTCOME 3: Strengthening Adolescent well-being to promote adolescent growth in developmental assets, life skills and/or basic skills.

To strengthen life skills development among adolescents (12-18 years), the project prioritized activities enabling youth to promote adequate food supply in their communities as part of the “enough campaign.” Monitoring data reveals that 653 adolescents are actively participating in impact+ clubs where they acquire practical life skills applied to various community development initiatives. Notably, 35 adolescents have designed their own entrepreneurial projects, including pig farming, poultry farming, and production of nutritious porridge. The project has provided specialized training to 15 adolescents in pig farming techniques and distributed 30 piglets to 10 adolescents who are implementing pig farming ventures.

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