

# IMPROVING THE LIFE CHANCES OF CHILDREN BY PROVIDING WATER, SANITATION AND IMPROVED NUTRITION IN NURSERY SCHOOLS

Working with local partners Pump Aid is increasing access to clean water, sanitation and nutrition in pre-schools in Malawi, increasing attendance, reducing absence and improving the life chances of some of the world's most impoverished children

## THE IMPORTANCE OF NURSERY PROVISION

In Malawi, as in other developing countries, access to education is key to improving the life chances of children. Despite ostensibly universal primary school provision, school attendance in Malawi is low and only 50% of those who complete primary school go on to attend at secondary level. Much of this is due to the array of health problems that afflict children, particularly in rural areas where most of the country's population lives. Moreover, performance at school is not consistent, with the effects of malnutrition and delayed cognitive development hindering learning.

Community Based Childcare Centres (CBCCs) are a crucial element of the Malawian Government's Early Childhood Development Strategy. These are nursery schools for 3 to 5 year olds which aim to improve childhood survival and support healthy growth. CBCCs improve subsequent school attendance and completion and improve the preparation of children (and their carers) for the transition to primary education. CBCCs are run entirely by local volunteers. They provide a stimulating pre-school learning environment for young children and are particularly beneficial to vulnerable children, orphans and the disabled, as they provide the security and care that is unavailable elsewhere. Children attending CBCCs cope better (academically and socially) at school than those who did not attend. Moreover, the use of CBCCs for the distribution of nutritional supplements has helped to mitigate some of the effects of malnutrition. These are powerful reasons to support the expansion and improvement of CBCCs. There is however a chronic shortage of government spending allocated to pre-school facilities.

## MALAWI INDICES

- HDI rank: 171/187
- Under-five diarrhoea rate: 24%
- Under-five stunting rate: 42%
- Under-five mortality due to diarrhoea: 4,500 pa (18%)
- Nursery school provision: 32%
- Primary school completion: 51%
- Safe water source (urban/rural): 95/82%
- Safe water source functionality (borehole/GFS): 70/50%
- Sanitation facilities urban/rural: 50/54%



A basic CBCC

## THE NEED FOR SAFE WATER AND SANITATION

In Malawi child health problems are a constant issue for parents and schools to manage. Malnutrition, which stunts physical and cognitive development, is widespread and water-borne diseases caused by low WASH standards frequently prevent children from going to school. A survey in 2014 showed that sanitation and hygiene standards in 75% of CBCCs were below the minimum required to prevent exposure to water-borne diseases and the lack of secure latrines and basic cleaning facilities has weakened efforts to provide a safe environment for vulnerable children. Poor WASH conditions in CBCCs reduce attendance and engagement in activities and, while many CBCCs provide food (63% in 2014), the majority of these meals are carbohydrate-based, lacking the balanced nutritional profile that is crucial for a young child's development.

In a country where 51% of children do not finish their primary education, maximising the impact of CBCCs is an absolute priority if the cycle of poverty and dependency is to be broken

## PUMP AID'S CCBC CENTRED APPROACH

Drawing on our experience in the construction and maintenance of WASH facilities, we want to ensure that all CBCCs have operational child-friendly latrines and WASH facilities. Our pilot studies and other programmes have taught us that lasting behaviour change is a key component of embedding WASH in the community so, we use a multi-layered approach, centred on School-Led Total Sanitation, in which children and community members engage in activities that reinforce improved behaviour and encourage the use of safe facilities and hygiene practices. Placing WASH at the centre of CBCCs does more than just help the children who attend them, for CBCCs are increasingly becoming the focal point for a range of development activities, where different organisations provide complementary services aimed at the entire community.

Many of our partners provide feeding programmes in CBCCs as having at least one nutritious meal a day is proven to reduce the incidence of stunting and the offer of food also encourages children to attend. However, without safe water and hygienic toilets, many children fall ill and, as a consequence, miss out on this food and also education. It is vital to counter the effects of malnutrition in the early years of a child's life because, if the opportunity is missed, the child will never make up the difference and will be adversely affected for the rest of their life. By promoting WASH, in concert with government and other NGOs, such as Mary's Meals, we aim to enhance and expand the impact of CBCCs on current and future generations.

## FOCUS OF ACTIVITY



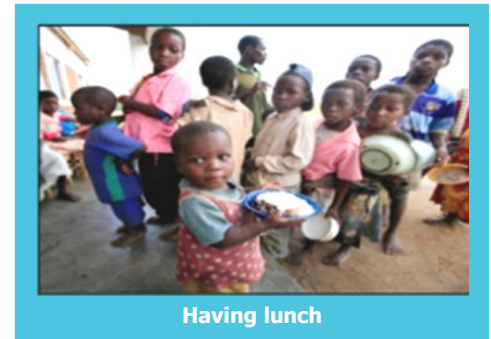
Though this project has the potential to benefit all children in Malawi, we are initially working in the Districts of Kasungu, Mchinji and Blantyre. In our project areas, at least 75% of CBCCs do not have adequate access to safe water or hygienic latrines despite widespread evidence that access to safe water and hygienic latrines can reduce child mortality rates by up to 90%.

We deliver better hygiene and sanitation practices through skilled facilitation with children, caregivers and parents. Well before pump and latrine installation, we work with volunteers at the CBCCs to assess their needs and make sure all facilities are located for maximum benefit and we train caregivers and parents in pump and latrine maintenance and repair. We also deliver interactive learning sessions to help children understand the importance of improving their hygiene behaviours. This helps reduce and end open defecation practices and enables children to live healthy and fulfilling lives. We also help caregivers to set up kitchen gardens to grow food to distribute at the CBCCs and we work with the surrounding community to help improve sanitation and hygiene behaviours throughout the area, giving caregivers, mothers and the wider community the knowledge and practice of good hygiene and sanitation to share with others and ensure a lasting impact.

After installation we collect data and monitor the change from how CBCC's used water at the site identification stage, immediately after installation and from 6 to 12 months later to assess the effectiveness of pump caretakers and the knowledge retained. Regular meetings during and after installation review roles, consider problems and agree actions. Health data collected from health centres and district health zones also helps us to quantify our



Arriving for school



Having lunch



Hand-washing with soap

**Community Based Childcare Centres offer a potent solution to the challenges of Early Childhood that many children experience in Malawi and investment in Early Childhood Development is vital for laying the foundations of a prosperous and sustainable future**

*This project is delivered in partnership with Mary's Meals*