

# SCOPE HIV SUCCESS STORY

## MALAWI



IMPower Instructors at Phereni Primary School demonstrating to learners on how to defend themselves against perpetrators.

USAID/World Relief: Photo by Annie Chisale, World Relief.

### LOCATION

Njewa TA, Lilongwe, Malawi

### SUMMARY

IMPower groups in Njewa TA are empowering youth to speak out and seek justice for sexual and gender-based violence they have experienced.

[WORLDRELIEF.ORG/SCOPEHIV](http://WORLDRELIEF.ORG/SCOPEHIV)

## IMPOWER OFFERS HOPE TO CHILDREN THREATENED BY SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN LILONGWE

SCOPE HIV partners with communities and faith-based organizations to prevent HIV and raise awareness and justice for children in Malawi. The SCOPE project addresses one of the leading causes and results of HIV, sexual and gender-based violence, through its work with youth training programs like *IMPower*. *IMPower* provides youth ages 9-14 with lessons on positive gender norms, self-defense, and bystander intervention skills.

In Njewa, many children have experienced sexual violence at the hands of trusted adults in their community. These children often fail to report these incidents due to their fears of social repercussions and physical threats. Through *IMPower*, many victims have been able to speak out about sexual and gender-based violence that they have experienced and have been empowered to seek justice.

### IMPOWER HELPS CHILDREN FIGHT BACK AGAINST ABUSE

In Lilongwe, prior to the rollout of *IMPower* classes, many children who were victims of sexual violence failed to report these incidents due to their fears of social repercussions and physical threats. Children also expressed an inability to view their home and church communities as safe spaces to shelter from injustices and violence. As these children observed, sometimes even their parents and other authority figures form part of the power dynamics that perpetuate oppression and violence against them through threats and abuse. Recognizing the

urgency of this situation, *IMPower* instructors who lead the *IMPower* clubs Survivors in Recovery Anonymous (SIRA) groups collaborated with service providers that foster gender justice and child protection.

Many boys and girls who attended *IMPower* classes have already benefited from their newly-gained skills in self-defense. For instance, two female survivors escaped rape attempts by successfully defending themselves from the perpetrators using the skills from their training. One of the girls, an 11-year-old in her fourth year of school, describes fighting back against her attacker: “I knocked the groin of the rapist before poking him in his eyes to leave hold of me.” Another 11-year-old boy describes using his defense skills to rescue a young sexual assault victim from an adult attacker.

### ***IMPOWER* HELPS CHILDREN SPEAK OUT AGAINST VIOLENCE**

Since *IMPower* classes began, more children have been speaking up to report sexual violence and assault cases. Across the three cohorts (between January 2021 and March 2022), a total of 82 cases were reported. Consequently, service providers have begun providing psychosocial counseling to most children who reported cases, and the perpetrators have faced punishment.

Although still in its early stages, there are indications of positive outcomes from this intervention. The presence of SCOPE HIV’s *IMPower* clubs in Lilongwe has positively influenced many children to protect themselves and break the silence on issues of sexual and



*IMPower* students practicing *IMPower* skills during an *IMPower* session.

USAID/World Relief: Photo by Annie Chisale, World Relief.

gender-based violence. Many of these children can now report sexual and gender-based violence cases and defend themselves from perpetrators. *IMPower* sessions promise to continue benefitting children throughout the region as they find support in areas like counseling referrals and medical support.

*This story is written by Comfort Mvutho, M&E Assistant and Elizabeth Cooper, SCOPE Communications Intern.*