



# The Power of Giving Opportunities

## Youth in Action-Malawi



**In a tiny salon, with a poster of men’s haircuts styles on the wall, stands Martida. She is not the owner of the first salon, but also the only barber in the village of Champhoyo, in Central Malawi.**

Martida is 19 years old and a single mother to a little boy who is 3.5 years old. When she was about to start secondary school, she became pregnant. She found it hard to attend school while pregnant, so she dropped out.

In Malawi, 24 % of those who are 18 years of age and below drop out after eight years of school. Early pregnancy, child marriage, or the inability of parents to afford school fees are the most common reasons for girls to drop out of school. They end up not able to read or write and lack the foundational skills that give them access to safe and sustainable livelihood opportunities.

Before she joined the Youth in Action (YiA) program, Martida felt she reached a dead-end for her dreams. “My boyfriend has never supported me and our child. I thought the coming years would only bring more poverty and less hopes”. It became her full responsibility to raise the child and find a source of income to meet their needs. She started to sell fried fish. This was barely enough to meet the basic needs of the child, but this was not what she was looking for. She was looking for an opportunity that could offer her a greater sense of possibility for the future.

Martida saw YiA as an opportunity to explore the difference between selling food and having a skilful business. Since 2012, the program has been working in Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Egypt, Uganda and Malawi, with rural girls and boys, who are between 12 -18 years old. The aim is to support them in improving their socio-economic status through building and enhancing their foundational skills like literacy, numeracy, financial literacy and social assets and knowledge in order to facilitate their access to safe and sustainable livelihood opportunities.

Going through the program’s first phase – the learning phase - Martida has refined her reading and writing skills, learned how to manage her financial resources and began to critically look at livelihood opportunities in her community. She learned how to understand the market by mapping out what was already offered in the community, gaps in terms of services, and the importance of savings and customer service. Through this learning process, she acquired a renewed sense of purpose.

Then, Martida had to choose a program pathway: to start a small business or to receive vocational training. She chose to go into the hairdressing technical training stream with the idea of then opening up her own salon, supported by YiA capital at the end of the training. There were only a couple of salons in the village with higher demand. When she opened her business, she noticed there was no barbershop in her village and men have to go to other villages for barbering. She decided to offer an interesting spin on a traditional trade: she services both women and men,

which is unusual in her community. “At the beginning, I did not feel comfortable and I had problems in gaining male customers trust”. Martida explained. She used to see around four men and ten women a day. With time, “Men started to realize that my barbering skills are better than other male barbers and cheaper. Now I have an average of 10 men and six women a day,” she added.

Martida is now the only female barber in the community. She is currently saving money on a weekly basis. It might be small amount of money; however, what counts for Martida is the set of life and technical skills she gained that have helped her in defining what path she wants to take towards a profitable business. She has already used some of her savings to buy chickens to start a parallel business. Martida eventually wants to open up other salons in a nearby community and hire young people like her to run them. She is doing well and her family, who supported her all along, are pleased with the results.

She believes that, “young people need to be patient and put in the work and eventually you see results. Many young people want instant gratification; I have learned that money alone does not make a successful business. You need to learn some skills to become successful.”