News
Ministry



Fatima Katandika (right) and her four young children were driven from home by her husband. Mary Consoler of the Afflicted Sisters in Malawi assisted her to build a makeshift shelter and to start an income-generating project. (Courtesy of Mary Consoler of the Afflicted Sisters)



by Tawanda Karombo

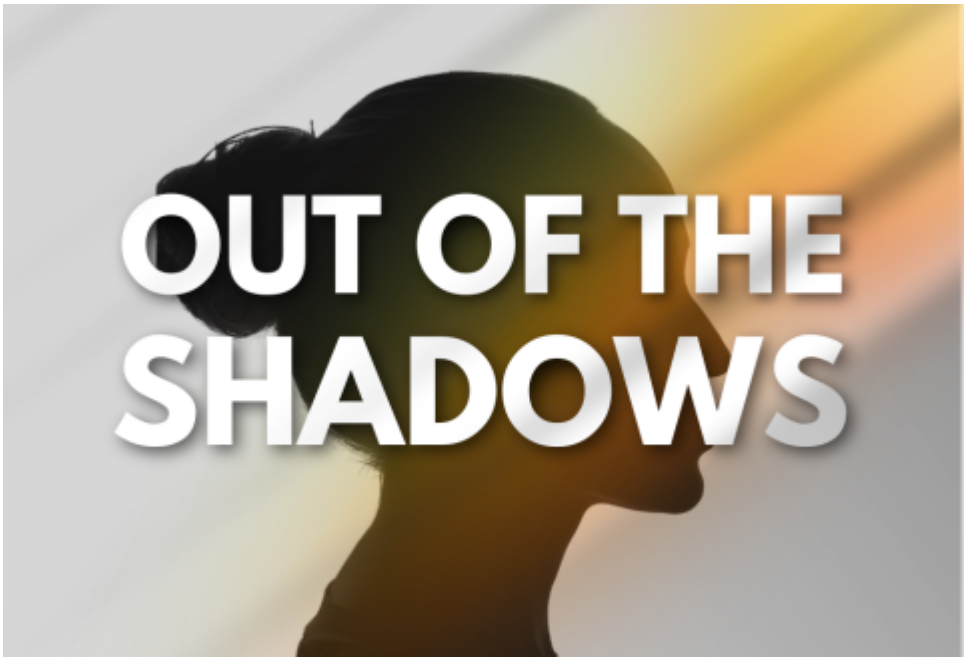
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Harare, Zimbabwe — March 11, 2026

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Editor's note: *This story is part of Global Sisters Report's yearlong series, "Out of the Shadows: Confronting Violence Against Women," focused on the ways Catholic sisters are responding to this global phenomenon.*



(GSR logo/Olivia Bardo)

Fatima Katandina was beaten up and chased away from home by her husband in rural and impoverished central Malawi last year.

This left her and the couple's four young children homeless and destitute. Scrambling for a way out of her dire situation, Katandina approached the Mary Consoler of the Afflicted Sisters for assistance.

The Mary Consoler of the Afflicted Sisters of Malawi work with women who have been abused or forced out of their homes by their husbands. The sisters provide counseling, shelter and, whenever they can, assistance with income-generating projects.

The sisters offered Katandina help to make a fresh start and to have a positive mindset about her future life.

Katandina and her husband "were always having disputes. The fights intensified during harvest period in April when I would ask for money from him and he would not buy any food, leaving the family struggling without food," she said in an interview with Global Sisters Report.

"He would come home late and drunk, wake me up, beat me up and ask that I cook for him at night."

The disagreements intensified, with the beatings becoming more frequent, enraging Katandina. Community members sought to intervene by trying to reconcile the two but the effort was in vain.

Ultimately, the situation escalated, culminating in the husband driving away Katandina and her four children from home.

The Mary Consoler of the Afflicted Sisters, themselves battling a funding crunch since U.S. President Donald Trump curtailed international development and aid funding, took her in and assisted her in building a makeshift shelter of iron sheets. It was an important intervention that ensured Katandina and her children did not stay homeless for long.

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The sisters also supported her in starting a small project of selling vegetables and popcorn by the roadside. That income she generates is the difference between what she can eke out for a meal and going to bed hungry, she said.

Gender-based violence is entrenched in Malawi, where "nearly 1 in 2 Malawian women (46%) have experienced physical or sexual violence in their lifetime," according to a 2025 report by the United Nations Development Program.

Further worsening the situation are child marriages that remain "a pressing issue, with 38% of girls married before age 18."

This, reported the U.N., perpetuates the cycles of poverty and inequality.

Sr. Elizabeth Lapozo and her group of 20 sisters have been overwhelmed by the rising scourge of violence against women by their partners.

"The problem of gender-based violence in our diocese and in Malawi is increasing due to promiscuity behaviors of men and to poverty," Lapozo told GSR. "There are entrenched cultural practices that are further contributing to the situation and it's disheartening to note that we cannot help many of those women affected because we do not have the resources or the funds to assist women affected or displaced by domestic violence."

The Catholic Church in Malawi is involved in programs that seek to address gender-based violence. Recently, the Council of Teresian Sisters partnered with the Catholic Women Association on a program that aims to support women in overcoming the challenges they face and promoting positive change in their communities, according to Teresian Sr. Teresa Mulenga.

Furthermore, Irish Catholic charity Trocaire oversees programs that provide training for women groups in Malawi as well as focusing on prevention of gender-based violence through promoting social change.

A portion of the funding for women development and empowerment programs in Malawi was provided by the U.S. Agency for International Development and other international donors. With that aid gone, the Mary Consoler of the Afflicted Sisters fear that more women will now suffer in silence and without assistance.



Nachisale Joseti had her house destroyed by her husband's relatives. The Mary Consoler of the Afflicted Sisters of Malawi helped her lodge a complaint with traditional leaders, helping end the wave of abuse. (Courtesy of Mary Consoler of the Afflicted Sisters)

Supported by well-wishers and using their own resources, the sisters also work with traditional community leaders to try to change the entrenched traditional practices under which women are objectified and viewed as less important. Often, the sisters

intervene in domestic disputes.

"They called us to forgive each other but men are too stubborn. [The Mary Consoler of the Afflicted congregation] has really been helpful for us women in these abusive situations and the daily life struggles," said Katandina.

Even though masculinity and male chauvinism are deeply rooted into traditional and cultural practices in Malawi, the United Nations Population Fund said that a "quiet transformation is taking place, reshaping age-old societal norms."

"Men, traditionally seen as guardians of a conservative masculinity, are now actively encouraging each other to lead the charge against gender-based violence," the U.N. Population Fund said in a 2024 report. The organization is working with local men on programs aimed at raising awareness and equipping the community to address and report gender-based violence incidents.

Still, Lapazo tells Global Sisters Report that gender-based violence is problematic on a bigger scale.

"Our program was born out of the realization that a lot of women are suffering. We have also uncovered that the abuse of women also leaves young children vulnerable to poverty," she said.

"We assist in the smallest way we can. Obviously, we would want to help as many women as possible, but with no funding we are very much limited."

Recently, the Mary Consoler of the Afflicted Sisters assisted a woman whose house had been demolished by the relatives of her late husband. Under African traditional practices, women are objectified, with their rights to property and freedoms trampled. Often, widowed women are driven from their homes if they refuse to remarry into the family of the late husband. The sisters helped Nachisale Joseti lodge a complaint with the head of the village.

"It was through this intervention that we managed to talk to the uncle and he subsequently apologized for what he had done to Joseti because he was going to be punished by the community authority," said Lapazo.

Despite the abuses they face, many women do not have the resources to escape their marriages, said Lapozo.

The sisters use their "little income to start brick molding projects" to build houses for vulnerable women, including those whose houses were destroyed by adverse weather patterns such as storms, flooding and wind.

"Poverty is our crime because we are limited in options so we end up continuing to suffer the abuses," Joseti said.

This story appears in the **Out of the Shadows: Confronting Violence Against Women** feature series. View the full series.