

WOMEN FOR CHANGE 2019 UPDATE

Women for Change (WfC) is an NGO that works in rural communities in Zambia, focusing on social and economic changes that empower women and children. Established in 1992, WfC has grown into one of the most influential indigenous NGOs in Zambia. Women for Change has been a partner of The United Church of Canada since 1992. Their vision statement is “Never Accept Poverty. Unite and Fight It.”

The UCW is collaborating with WfC to support a project helping ensure girls have access to, and complete, their education. Project goals are:

- stable and sustainable education for children, particularly girls
- widespread social acceptance of education not only as a right, but an essential component to addressing issues of poverty
- working to address the numbers of girls dropping out of school rural districts

The problem...

Girls are dropping out of school – particularly in rural districts

Why...

- Traditional attitudes towards women
- Poverty
- Early marriage
- Gender based violence
- Teen pregnancy
- Choice to use scarce resources to educate boys rather than girls
- Cultural norms that say education is not necessary to be a good wife and mother

How will **Women for Change** address the problem...

Working with others -

Political, NGO and community structures to encourage girl children in rural areas to enroll and stay in schools.

Working with families -

Livelihood training to address economic issues and hardships for families living in poverty. working with parents and traditional leaders to build awareness of the importance of education in reducing poverty and improving day to day lives for women and children.

Working with teachers -

Teachers trained to support the girls in their return to school.

Working with girls -

Motivate girls to re-enrol in school.

Providing Bursaries -

Offering bursaries to girls to ease the family financial burden

Through January–June 2019 Women for Change focussed efforts supporting the goal of increasing girls’ participation in education on these issues:

Teen Pregnancy and Early Marriage

WfC is implementing a one-year project focused on the Prevention of Unplanned Pregnancies to Increase Girls’ Access to and Retention in Schools in Rufunsa District. Many women suffer and die from

complications of pregnancy and childbirth in the rural parts of Rufunsa district as in other rural parts of Zambia. The challenges of high levels of maternal complications and mortality are a result of early pregnancies and unsafe abortions. Moreover, most of the young girls who fall pregnant drop out of school and are forced into early marriages. This shatters their dream of ever acquiring quality education which could break the cycle of poverty in their families.

This project focuses on working with the community to develop local solutions to

- (i) improve access to information on gender and Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR) and services among community members;
- (ii) increase the capacities of community members to analyse and make changes to traditions and cultural practices that prevent women's access to comprehensive reproductive health;
- (iii) provide space for intergenerational discussion on SRH and participation of men and boys as champions of SRHRs in women and girls; and
- (iv) increase male participation in family planning and contraception.

Community discussions agreed that parents, other family members, communities schools and clinics all have an important role to play in supporting adolescents and promoting health development. The community continues to move forward in developing local solutions.

29 community members (15 female and 14 male) attended a five-day training as peer educators in children's rights and sexual and reproductive health rights in Rufunsa. The community members who were drawn from various villages of Bunda Bunda Chiefdom were trained to facilitate discussions in their respective villages on access to sexual and reproductive health and rights especially for young women. The trained peer educators developed an action plan to conduct 50 community meetings as a way of increasing the reach of the project.

Raising awareness of rights to education

In Kapiri Mposhi and Mumbwa districts WfC is focusing on raising community awareness of children's rights to education particularly the rights of girls including boys and men; traditional and religious leaders; and teachers and other opinion leaders. These key leaders will be encouraged to become champions of girls' education through peer-to-peer support and deliberate investments in girls' education.

256 community members attended the introduction of the project (145 females, 111 males) and welcomed its introduction. During the meetings, teachers particularly cited the increasing number of girls who were dropping from school due to pregnancy or early marriage and were not returning to continue with their education. They overwhelmingly welcomed the intervention and pledged support to the project

400 Community conversations were conducted in Mumbwa and Kapiri Mposhi districts reaching a total of 447 (268 female and 169 male) community members and key stakeholders. Community members and stakeholders, including government officials expressed happiness with the project considering the issues of teen pregnancy and child marriages which were a draw-back especially to girls' education. They overwhelmingly welcomed the intervention and pledged their support.