

## WOMEN FOR CHANGE – ZAMBIA

**United Church Women** have a long tradition of supporting the ministries of The United Church of Canada through Mission & Service. In September, 2018, the **National United Church Women Executive** adopted a global project implemented by United Church global partner **Women for Change, Zambia** to celebrate our 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary as a UCW in 2022.

Women for Change (WFC) is a Non Governmental Organization (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.

**WHERE IS ZAMBIA?** Zambia is a landlocked country in Southern-Central Africa. Its neighbors are the Democratic Republic of the Congo to the north, Tanzania to the north-east, Malawi to the east, Mozambique to the southeast, Zimbabwe and Botswana to the south, Namibia to the southwest, and Angola to the west. The capital city is Lusaka, located in the south-central part of Zambia. The population is concentrated mainly around Lusaka in the south and the Copperbelt Province to the northwest, the core economic hubs of the country.

Zambia ranks among the countries with highest levels of poverty and inequality globally. 58% (2015) of Zambia's 16.6 million people earn less than the international poverty line of **\$1.90 per day** and three quarters of the poor live in rural areas.

The landlocked country has experienced rapid economic growth over the last decade as Africa's second largest copper producer after the DR Congo. But its over-reliance on copper has made it vulnerable to falling commodity prices. Zambia also has one of the world's fastest growing populations with the UN projecting that its population will triple by 2050.

**WOMEN FOR CHANGE, ZAMBIA PROJECT** focuses on social and economic changes that empower women and children. Access to education for everyone, regardless of income, is an essential part of securing greater justice, broad based participation in society and the eradication of poverty. The United Church, working with Mission & Service global partners, understands education is a basic human right and a critical part of the global strategy to end poverty and ensure prosperity for all people over the next 15 years. While education is key to development, many children face significant barriers to education and in many countries girls face multiple challenges.

Traditional attitudes towards women, poverty, early marriage, gender based violence and a choice to use scarce resources to educate boys rather than girls, can all stand in the way of women and girls fully participating in education. Being blocked for education has lifelong implications for women and communities. It decreases family income, increases health risks and places women and girls at a higher risk of trafficking and exploitation. Accessible education for girls and women is an effective way to improve the lives of individual families as well as communities living in poverty.

While the Zambian government has made education a key priority and much work has been done, more remains to be done to create a stable and sustainable education system for children, particularly girls. One challenge is to win widespread social acceptance of education not only as a right, but an essential component to addressing issues of poverty. This is a particular challenge in rural areas.

WFC is working to address the numbers of girls dropping out of school in rural districts in Zambia. Social norms lead to an understanding that the appropriate role for girls is to be a good wife and mother and cultural norms dictate that education is not necessary for that role. In traditional communities girls who have entered puberty go through several rites of passage that prepare them for the role of wife and mother. After going through these rites, many parents opt to arrange marriages for their daughters rather than pay for education. Most families living in poverty would opt to keep boys in school and arrange marriages for the girls.

The program, works with adolescent girls aged 10-18 who often drop out of High School because of early marriage, teen pregnancy or lack of water and sanitation. The program offers incentives to girls to motivate them to re-enroll in school. Teachers are given training to help support the girls in their return to school. An additional focus will be 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.

Women for Change will coordinate with political, NGO and community structures with similar goals to create an atmosphere that encourages girl children in rural areas to enroll and stay in schools. To encourage families to keep their girl children in school, WFC will also work with parents of vulnerable children to promote livelihood training and entrepreneurship so that economic issues and hardships for families living in poverty are addressed.

**WHAT CAN THE UCW DO?** Learn about Zambia and Women for Change, Zambia. Support Women for Change, Zambia in prayer, and contribute funds to help Women for Change, Zambia keep girls in school.

**Additional Resources:**

Mandate, Summer 2019, page 6, Women For Change transforms lives.

Gifts with Vision October 2018, page 10, Remove Barriers to Education.

United Church web site: [www.united-church.ca](http://www.united-church.ca) home page, choose “Search”, type Women for Change and 5 items should come up. One is a slide presentation.

Send your donation to Joyce Osborne, Treasurer, UCW Western Ontario Waterways, Box 298, Ripley, ON N0G 2R0.

**Make your cheque payable to UCW Western Ontario Waterways** and indicate that it is a donation to Women for Change, Zambia.

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