

**Sustainable Development Goal 5:
Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.**

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5, which aims to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, is undoubtedly one of the most complex but important goals. Despite years of fighting, women still experience a broad spectrum of inequality and oppression, globally.

Zambian society is absolutely rife with gender inequality. The lives of women and girls are affected by deeply entrenched gender roles, oppressive cultural norms, and systemic inequality. The first, and potentially most difficult, entry point is cultural and traditional leaders such as chiefs and headmen. There are a number of cultural/traditional practices and norms which foster gender inequality in Zambia – valuing boy children over girl children, ceremonies teaching young girls how to take care of their future husbands, an aversion to discussing reproductive health/rights, etc. The goal is not to destroy these aspects of culture but rather adapt them so that they can be used to support women and girls. Educating traditional leaders on the importance of empowering women and girls, and engaging them in the fight against inequality will hopefully inspire change in both the private and public sphere. Moreover, the areas in which traditional leaders have the most power (usually villages and smaller districts) are often the areas in which women experience the most inequality. Meaning that the engagement of these leaders will allow information to reach those who might otherwise be left out. The second entry point is Zambian men. A majority of Zambian women are already aware of their rights and are actively fighting for equality, however their capacity do so is limited by their husbands, fathers, uncles, peers, and leaders. It is increasingly evident that the real empowerment of women and girls is not possible without a change in the behaviour of their oppressors. The last point of entry is youth. When youth, particularly young women, are educated and empowered they have the power to change the discourse surrounding gender in their communities and push for greater equality.

Canada has exhibited shockingly high levels of gender inequality, particularly for a developed country and has been chastised for having incredibly high rates of missing and murdered Aboriginal women. Therefore, one of the most important entry points in Canada is within marginalized populations – First Nation’s groups, migrants, and people living in a lower socio-economic bracket, etc. – as they are the ones who experience the highest levels of inequality. Another extremely important entry point in Canada is with civil society organizations, namely women’s groups and organizations. These groups have the ability to educate Canadians about gender inequality and push for the empowerment of women and girls.

One of the greatest barriers to gender equality in Zambia is economic dependence, making economic independence an important aspect of empowering women. This can be done through programs that focus on skill building, savings, and budgeting – entrepreneurship programs, savings groups, etc. Moreover, implementing youth programs such as peer education would aid in the fight against gender inequality by giving young people the knowledge and resources to educate others about the importance of empowering women and girls. Another important program would revolve around the inclusion of men. It is important for men, the ones largely responsible for perpetuating inequality, to play a role in women’s empowerment. This could be a program, similar to the aforementioned youth program, where men are educated on the importance of equality and spread this knowledge to others. In Zambian schools it is also important to make a shift, away from gendered curriculums, towards equal and empowering education – focus on female leadership, the dangers of gender inequality, economic empowerment, sexual and reproductive health, etc. Lastly I think it is important to educate cultural and traditional leaders about the importance of empowering women and include them throughout. They have a great deal of influence, particularly in more marginalized communities, and therefore have a greater capacity to address gender inequality.

In recent years many Canadian women’s organizations have seen their funding pulled and as a result, many have dissolved. I think it is extremely important to encourage and rebuild these important civil society organizations as they have a greater platform for

advocating for women's rights, sexual and reproductive health, political participation, and marginalized groups. Rebuilding these groups will hopefully draw attention to the vast gender inequality in Canada and encourage people to Canadians to push for greater equality.

I think it is extremely important to address micro, community level inequalities before trying to tackle systemic inequality. For example, in order to increase women's participation in government, there must be a focus on empowerment and leadership at the community level. This is because in order to address large-scale structural inequalities it is necessary to have a foundation of real empowerment.