

## Youth Voices in Development: Assignment #2

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### Addressing Gender Equality in Zambia

*Goal 5: Gender Equality*  
*Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls*

#### Introduction

Women and girls in Zambia are faced with an uphill battle with regards to equal opportunity and still have a long way to go in achieving Goal 5 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Zambia continues to battle with high numbers of child marriages, high drop out rates for school, gender based violence (GBV), the lack of women in positions of socio-economic and political influence, among others. The main obstacles to gender equality being attained are negative practices, cultural norms, and patriarchy.

According to the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index for 2015, Zambia is ranked 116, out of 145 countries. This means that Zambia is rated among the worst 30 countries with the highest levels of gender inequality in the whole world. Zambia is also ranked third highest country with cases of child marriages in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region, according to Girls Not Brides with 42% of women aged 20-24 years married by the age of 18, many of whom live in rural areas among the poor and marginalized communities. A 2010 Central Statistical Office reports that only 13% of girls ever make it to secondary school. This is further supported by a United Nations Population fund report that found that 65% of women with no education were married before attaining the age of 18. Further, according to the National Assembly of Zambia website, out of 158 members of Parliament, only 22 are women. This means only 13% of all MPs are women.

In Zambia, there are various stakeholders involved as entry points in addressing Goal 5 of the SDGs such as the government, non-governmental organizations (NGO), civil society, traditional leaders, and communities themselves. Although in my response I will be touching upon all of the above, the majority of my response will be taken from an NGO standpoint – specifically that of Women for Change – as this aligns much better with my experience thus far.

#### Case in Point: Women for Change – NGO

Women for Change (WfC), is a gender-focused organization that builds the capacities of rural communities, especially women and girls, to achieve sustainable human development. WfC envisions a society that upholds gender equality. All of WfC's work aims to improve the lives and positions of women in society. WfC's approaches and methodology as an organization have gender at their center and are sustainable in order for change to be everlasting. For example, WfC uses popular education methodologies (PEM) to engage communities. PEM tools follow adult education principles, which place learners at the center. This is an empowering approach that starts where the people are and aims to create a critical mass that is able to take charge of its own development agenda in a gender sensitive way. In addition, WfC employs a rights based approach to development, encouraging rural populations to claim their rights by critically analyzing and acting upon issues affecting their communities using gender analysis, PEM, and advocacy to achieve sustainable development. Importantly, WfC's model of using Area Associations (AAs) and community groups is a proven sustainable method in community projects. At community level, WfC works with groups comprised of 35-40 members. The groups are encouraged to link with other groups in a given radius, once 10 groups have linked, they establish an

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AA with representation of two members from each group. Subsequently, 10-12 AA's further coordinate activities together at the level of District Development Associations (DDAs), which ensures the creation of a critical rural voice able to articulate development issues of their interest, take action against vices hindering community development, and implement large-scale community-led initiatives. Additionally, WfC encourages affirmative action that provides for women participation in key leadership positions (i.e. Chairperson and Treasurer) at each level of the group structure. While rural communities are being mobilized into a critical mass, women take a central position to ensure gender issues are addressed in community development. Moreover, WfC is the lead or co-implementer in numerous projects at the moment. Interestingly, no matter what the project deals with, for instance forestry management, WfC ensures that gender is streamlined throughout the project.

Further, WfC strictly works in rural areas. This is very important in achieving gender equality (and any development for that matter), as rural communities are the forgotten, poorest, and excluded groups in Zambia. Working with traditional leaders is also key to achieving gender equality in Zambia as they are viewed as the custodians of culture. One of the underlying constraints to achieving gender equality is the deeply entrenched patriarchal nature of the Zambian society. Traditional leaders can be powerful agents of change in rural areas. At the same time, traditional leaders have the potential to perpetuate negative traditional norms that hinder the rights of women. Due to WfC's vast experience and work with local Chiefs and headpersons, they are becoming more aware of the need to uphold good cultural practices and discard ones that are detrimental to the well being of their communities.

Some of WfC's current projects will be highlighted below under themed sections that will portray what is being done to advance gender equality in Zambia.

### Economic Leadership

WfC has supported women's economic leadership through promoting linkages and capacity support to community members. The organization appreciates that poverty carries a woman's face and the only way to deal with the negative repercussion of poverty is strengthening women's economic leadership. Thus, in the more than two decades of existence, focus has been on raising awareness on the need to address gender inequalities and promotion of women's participation. Economically this has seen increasing number of women participating in income generating activities especially those that are considered the preserve of men as well as raising women participation at higher levels of value chains. For example, the Mawa project focuses on building healthy, strong, resilient families and communities in Zambia. One of the key aspects of relevance is that Mawa uses the Savings and Internal Lending Communities (SILC) model, a savings group model which are user-owned, self-managed savings and credit groups that are accessible, transparent and flexible. SILC groups offer a convenient and safe opportunity to save, helps members build useful lump sums that become available at pre-determined times, and allows them to access small loans or emergency grants for investment and consumption. A major accomplishment of this project is that 120 savings and internal lending communities began saving and lending activities, with 2,504 members taking over 1,010 small loans collectively valued at USD 17,368. Additionally, the project called *Socio-economic development for women and men in Kapiri Mposhi and Mumbwa districts of Zambia* (under We Effect) builds the capacities of both women and men, in women's rights, gender analysis, leadership, basic entrepreneurship which has included start up support in identified income generating activities (IGAs) namely seed multiplication, bee keeping, gardening and small businesses. The skills development has seen an increasing number of women engaged in more productive farming ventures that is increasing their income.

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Also, in Nalolo, community members were trained to increase incomes from their traditional basket weaving wares. Increasing appreciation of Western province baskets locally and internationally provided an opportunity for the rural women in Nalolo to manage their basket weaving skills as business. They have since established basket weaving cooperatives and are able to export their products to Canada.

Furthermore, the Zambian government has recognized that all individuals including women need to have access to financial services and have taken affirmative action to address this. This is particularly evident with the government's focus on microfinance opportunities. The government has supported a number of self-serving skills.

### Gender-based Violence (GBV)

WfC is currently working in 75% of Zambia's provinces on addressing gender-based violence through various projects, namely through support of EU and UNDP. Both projects are working on ending GBV and increasing access to justice for victims. As both projects aim at sensitizing communities and working with traditional leaders, the EU project works to codify customary laws while the UNDP project has created One-Stop-Shops within the communities.

The Zambian government has initiated a commitment towards the elimination of GBV by including provisions in the national agenda and public policies to address the issue. The 2011 Anti-GBV Act and National Gender Policy are the main instruments for mainstreaming gender in the country. However, the lack of enforcement results in many GBV cases being dropped due to inconsistencies between customary and statutory laws. Customary laws and traditional courts are highly discriminatory against women and girls, leading to absence of justice. Statutory law, although offering better protection to women, also presents serious gaps as punishments and procedures are currently not clearly specified in the relevant national legislation, leading to ambiguous and inconsistent rulings. Neither the enactment of the 2011 Anti-GBV Act nor the dissemination of knowledge on GBV have been sufficient in decreasing the number of GBV related cases and positively impact behavioural changes and social attitudes at most local levels. Thus, a bridge to close the gap between national efforts and local disparities must be addressed. Also, the 2011 Anti-GBV Act presents several serious and obvious gaps with international standards. Among them, the law does not establish clear penalties for perpetrators of domestic violence nor does it specify any punishments. There is no definition or penalty for sexual assault, and there is a need to expand on the legal definition of healthcare provider so that community clinic workers are able to perform medical examinations and testify in court.

### Girl Child (Ending Child Marriage & Pregnancies and School Retention)

On May 13, 2016, the official launch of the Civil Society Network on Ending Child Marriage in Zambia took place, which WfC is a member. There were various stakeholders whom attended the launch to show their support in the fight against ending child marriage, including various chiefs who are working to end child marriages in their respective chiefdoms.

In addition, WfC has various projects working towards ending harmful practices for girls and retaining girls in school. Under Porticus, WfC is currently running a project in Sinda district to advance education for vulnerable rural girls in Zambia. A recent major accomplishment of this project is that 25 girls, some are also now young mothers, who stopped school in Grades 6 through 9, at Kapungwe Primary School, opted to go back to school after WfC had sensitized the community on girl child

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retention in school and ending child marriage and early pregnancies. Under this project, WfC also sensitizes communities on the re-entry policy, which allows girls to go back to school after having a child. Unfortunately, there is lack of information around the policy and/or girls do not re-enter school due to poverty levels (i.e. cannot afford school fees) and stigma. To address girls not attending school due to poverty levels, WfC also has partners whom sponsor girls to attend school and support in higher education fees.

### Women in Politics

Zambia National Women's Lobby (ZMWL) has been working very hard (in conjunction with various other NGOs, including WfC) to increase the number of women in politics. In Zambia's 2011 elections, women constituted 50.1% of registered voters but only held 14.6% of parliamentary seats and 5.8% of local government seats. The signing of the SADC protocol on Gender and Development in 2008, was a significant milestone for the gender agenda, specifically in SADC region. Regardless of Zambia being a signatory, women's participation in political decision-making remains low. On June 8, 2016, ZNWL held a press conference on the participation of women in the just ended adoption and nomination processes for the upcoming 2016 elections. We learned that the 2016 general elections sadly seem to be another lost chance for women to fully engage in the governance of the nation. Between 2013 and 2015, ZNWL trained 630 women aspiring to contest councilors and 320 aspiring members of parliament. However, the women were faced with many barriers out of their control. WfC has also been an active organization coaching female candidates and working with current women parliamentarians to help them retain their seats.

The new constitution signed into law in February 2016 set out a new affirmative framework for a largely 30% equality rule for elective and appointive positions while recognizing equal rights and the establishment of a Gender Equality Commission. However, as we can see from the above, implementation of this equality rule is lacking.

### Closing Remarks

Overall, we can see that social change and justice is needed in order to achieve gender equality within Zambia. First and foremost, there is a need to deconstruct traditional and cultural norms that place men above and before women. I have seen that most change comes from changes in norms, thoughts and practices. All people must be engaged and willing to create change. Another aspect that is lacking is men's participation due to the belief that gender only refers to women. However, achieving gender equality also requires men's involvement.

Importantly, we must recognize that equality before the law does not necessarily mean that women and men in practice have equal opportunity. This is very evident from the disparities between law, policies, and practice in the Zambian context.