

Goal Five: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.

1. What do you think are the entry points for addressing this goal in your host country, and what recommendations would you make for achieving this goal?

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There are many strides towards Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) Five taking place in Zambia. It is an interesting time to be a woman as the country moves away from traditional roles and towards a more progressive, equality-driven gender balance. Women are becoming more and more involved in politics; they are running grassroots organizations and NGOs, they are counseling youth on subjects that are important to Zambians, and there is even a female Vice-President currently in office. This assignment will attempt to outline some of the initiatives towards SDG Five that I have seen taking place in the Copperbelt Region of Zambia as well as some of the challenges that local leaders have made me aware of. The recommendations given in this assignment come from a place of pure observation combined with ideas I have heard local women talk about.

First, the good news; there are multiple programs taking place right now that are aimed at achieving gender equality and empowerment for women and girls. For example, there is coalition of local stakeholders who are working together to end Gender-Based Violence and achieve SDG 5.2 “eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation”. By involving stakeholders from NGOs, businesses and religious organizations, this Zambians coalition aims to bring awareness to a longstanding problem in their country.

Another program, that I have been fortunate enough to be a small part of is the “Vote for a Women Campaign 2016”. This campaign directly ties into SDG 5.5 of the SDGs which states: “ensure women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life”. This campaign aims to sensitize female voters, to reduce voter apathy, and to bring more women into the political arena. The campaign slogan is “Support Women’s Participation in Politics” and encourages Zambians to vote for a women president, members of parliament, and councilors.

The small role that we have played as interns at the YWCA is to distribute t-shirts, and promotional material to female councilors in the Copperbelt region. This has allowed me to be a part of many interesting and intelligent conversations while I interact with the women who are running in this year’s election. I had a particularly interesting conversation with a woman who is running to be councilor in the Kalulushi District; she told me about the work they are doing on the ground and the challenges that they face

while trying to sensitize women to political issues. One outstanding challenge they face is the fact that many of the women they speak to in the local villages are illiterate, which means they cannot just pass them a pamphlet and walk away- they must engage in lengthy conversations and take the opportunity to educate. This time-consuming operation is a large drain on human resources, but it is absolutely necessary in order to involve women of all classes in politics and move towards gender equality in Zambia. I believe this ground-level initiative exemplifies the most important entry point for achieving SDG five. It is local women who are experiencing the greatest effects of gender inequality and it is they who must come together in order to change things in their country. Through education and advocacy, Zambia could access one of their greatest resources for development: **Zambian Women**.

The bad news is that the women and men who are working on the ground in the more rural areas of Zambia are facing a huge hurdle when trying to achieve SDG Five. I have been told that tribal law and rituals are still the main source for onerous legal issues in many rural areas. Unfortunately, these ancient laws are not favorable for women as they support things like polygamy, child marriages, and the idea that a woman can “learn” better behavior if her husband punishes her. While it is important to note that many, many Zambians no longer support these customs, there are still many who do and in my opinion, it will be dissolving traditional laws that will be Zambia’s hardest fought battle. Without resolve of these oppressive laws it will be nearly impossible for women’s rights to progress in Zambia.

My recommendation for achieving SDG Five is to continue educating local people and encouraging women’s participation in policy making. The NGOs that I have encountered so far in the Copperbelt Region are adamant in their attempts to achieve equality for women and girls but I have heard multiple times that funding is an issue. With the limited funding that Zambia currently has dedicated to SDG Five, only a small portion of the population is being reached. There have also been issues of program overlap occurring in relation to on the ground education and advocacy. For example, a program the YWCA has proposed for a nearby village to educate young people about HIV and AIDs was refused funding because another NGO was running a very similar program there already. I would therefore recommend that NGOs use more efficient communication and pool their resources to work closely as to ensure the best use of the funding and human resources.

In summary, I believe that SDG Five should be supported and promoted with diligence in Zambia. Achieving gender equality is the most far-reaching SDG; it causes a ripple effect in moving forward on all of the other goals. From agriculture to education, women can contribute to each and every SDG and foster the continued development and stability of their country.