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Working Towards Freedom from Poverty and Food Insecurity

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The Sustainable Agriculture and Food Security grant program is a joint initiative of the Global Health Unit and United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR). This program is reaching women in Zambia and Zimbabwe, supporting entrepreneurs to break the poverty cycle in their families and communities through grants to community based partners like Nsugeni, a Zambia based non-organization.

These projects provide skills training in sustainable and integrated agriculture practice, food processing and preservation, and home hygiene that ultimately increase food security, household income, and market access. This has impacted the women in the communities in Zambia.

It helps women like Violet Tembo a mother of five children, a beneficiary of the Nsugeni-led project in Zambia. She says she is now able to support her family and help her youngest child go to school through her small farm because of the support she has received through the Sustainable Agriculture and Food Security program.

I have a field and a garden, but in previous years I never had a good harvest because I could not afford to pay subscription fees to the cooperative for the chemical fertilizer program. This year, after being trained on organic farming using locally available resources, I've managed to harvest 10bags of 50kgs of maize for consumption. Now it is summer, and I've already planted my tomatoes, vegetables, and onions, which are promising to give good yield as well. I've preserved my own vegetables. I will be able to sell some of my preserved vegetables and fresh tomatoes, onions, and vegetables. I've now joined the village banking group. Knowledge is power, nothing strange was brought by Nsugeni staff—I only discovered all the resources were around me. I am very happy and I will never use any chemical fertilizers. - Violet Tembo

Female farmers like Tembo in Lusaka, Zambia, learn to use local resources and natural ways to control pests through organic farming. This eliminates the need to use the chemical pesticides they had used in the past, which had potential negative consequences to the environment and to their health. Household communication on hygiene and nutrition reduced nutrition and hygiene-related diseases.



Photo by Global Health

In similar fashion, female farmers in Zimbabwe will be trained in small animal farming and in animal food source preservation methods as well as how to market surplus productions.

Context

Both Zambia and Zimbabwe are in southeast Africa, an area characterized by poor agro-ecological conditions and lack of diversity in agricultural production. In Zambia, the El Niño effect induced drought has been a major contributor to poor farming. Thus, farmers need support for construction of shallow-well irrigation systems and better storage method for the seeds. In Zimbabwe, agro-ecological conditions, climate change, and persistent droughts have also led to food shortages and malnutrition.

In Zambia, the food security project is implemented by Nsugeni. The Zambia-based organization is female-led and managed. Nsugeni Community-Based Organization was founded in 2006 as a Chindwin Homebased Care Savings and Loans Association. In 2015, the organization changed its name to better reflect its focus on community collaboration and empowerment of female farmers. "Nsugeni" is a Bemba word that translates to "help me" in English.

The implementing partner for the work in Zimbabwe is Fambidzinai. This organization has been working with United Methodist congregations across Zimbabwe, teaching food security, processing, preservation, livestock integration, nutrition/herbal gardening, as well as organic farming.

Moving Forward

Tembo's family was suffering from malnutrition, but due to her determination and vigorous work, she was able to defy the El Niño induced drought by producing crops through the program. Tembo now promotes organic farming because she has seen a lot of benefits to growing crops without chemical fertilizer. Her hope is that in five years she will have her own livestock that she can easily collect droppings to use for her organic field. She's hoping that her grandchildren would be free from malnutrition since she has learned how to produce and prepare healthy food.



Photo by Global Health

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