

Women for Change, Zambia

UCW Project Description

United Church Women have a long tradition of supporting the ministries of The United Church of Canada through Mission & Service. Through units, regional UCWs, and the NUCW, the United Church Women in all configurations have been, and continue to be active and generous supporters of local ministry in their communities as well as joining together to work for peace and justice, supporting ministries throughout Canada and around the world.

Mission & Service is about God's mission in the world and how The United Church of Canada participates in that mission. United Church Women have been outstanding in their generous contributions enabling global partnership, community ministry, social justice ministries, theological education and vocation, faith formation, local ministries, and conference leadership.

Together, United Church Women...

- pray about the issues and concerns they see around them
- educate themselves and others on those issues and concerns
- support the ministry of Mission & Service
- contribute designated funds that enable community and global partners to implement important projects

In September 2018 the National United Church Women adopted a global project implemented by United Church global partner Women for Change in Zambia. This project can be found in the 2019 Gifts with Vision Catalogue: www.giftswithvision.ca/products/keep-girls-in-school.

This project continues to reflect the long-term UCW interest in and commitment to education, beginning with the founding organizations of WMS and WA.

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"Never accept poverty. Unite and fight it."

Women for Change (WfC) is a non-governmental organization 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.

Project description

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 toward women, poverty, early marriage, gender-based violence, poverty, and a choice to use scarce resources to educate boys rather than girls can all stand in the way of women and

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girls fully participating in education. When girls are denied opportunities for education, it 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 also an essential component to addressing issues of poverty. This is a particular challenge in rural areas.

Women for Change 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 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 school. 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?

1. Learn more about the barriers to education faced by women and girls in Zambia, Canada, and other places.
2. Support in prayer Women for Change and others working to remove barriers to education for girls.
3. Support local community initiatives such as homework clubs, school breakfast programs, and after-school programs that help children succeed in school.
4. Advocate for effective international support for access to education.
5. Contribute funds to help Women for Change keep girls in school.

When contributing funds:

- Please make cheques payable to The United Church of Canada.
- Send to NUCW, 3250 Bloor St. West, Suite 200, Toronto, ON M8X 2Y4
- Note on the cheque or in an accompanying letter: NUCW—Women for Change, Zambia