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Women: Untapped potential for development

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WOMEN have for a long time been sidelined, yet they could contribute positively to economic development.

The contribution they can make to economic development has prompted Human and Women's Rights Organisation and Explore Africa Zambia to partner in an attempt to improve the livelihoods of women.

Human and Women's Rights Organisation spokesperson Gloria Steinem and Explore Africa Zambia spokesperson Cheri Briggs have made it a tradition to occasionally travel across the globe from the United States to check on the funding's projects they are working in the Lower Zambezi in Lusaka Province.

Since 2009 the two organisations have empowered rural women through business ventures such as chicken rearing and tailoring.

"The women are also offered professional training in organic agriculture, utilizing solar-powered irrigation to overcome water challenges, thus making it possible to grow crops in times of drought," said Ms Steinem.

Ms Steinem was accompanied by 18 other women from the US who are also committed to improving the livelihood of women.

"If rural women are given a hand to pull themselves out of poverty they can do it. Their tenacity, commitment to family, and incredible work ethic should be an example to everyone. I am proud to be a participant in what Explore Africa Zambia has achieved," Ms Steinem said.

She said world over, men have an upper hand while women are hindered from making progress in areas such as education.

Ms Briggs said once empowered, women could make a difference in society.

She appreciates the support she also receives from her husband, Richard Wilson, who also supports the cause.

In Chiawa village, 14 female beneficiaries belong to a group called Waka Simba, which means strong women in the local language.

The women in Chiawa village have also benefited from the construction of a labour clinic which was spearheaded by the two

organisations in partnership with Government. Supply of water and beds have also been provided to the clinic.

Besides being economically independent, 20 women are also being supported to get a higher education.

One of the beneficiaries, Elizabeth Kalio, said the women have become economically empowered because of the support from the two organisations.

"The problem we faced in this village was that women were faced with economic challenges, especially those that head homes. Some of those who are in marriages have irresponsible husbands," she said.

Ms Kalio is hopeful that from the income-generating business, she has hope of one day owning a vehicle.

Chiawa village has also being the first ever restaurant which is being run by women.

The project has also been extended to Maunda village where there are 36 families being supported by the two organisations.

In Maunda village, women and some men are also been supported to grow their produce using the solar irrigation system. An electric fence has also been constructed to protect their produce.

The group of women in Maunda area is called Malopa Fazi.

"We grow vegetables as a group. After selling the vegetables, the profit is shared among all members while the capital is used to gain grow vegetables," said Sedina Ndlovu, one of the beneficiaries.

She said the group makes more than K4,000 in a month.

"This project has assisted me and the other group members a lot. We are able to take our children to school from this money and some of it goes to meet our household needs and meet our medical bills," she said.

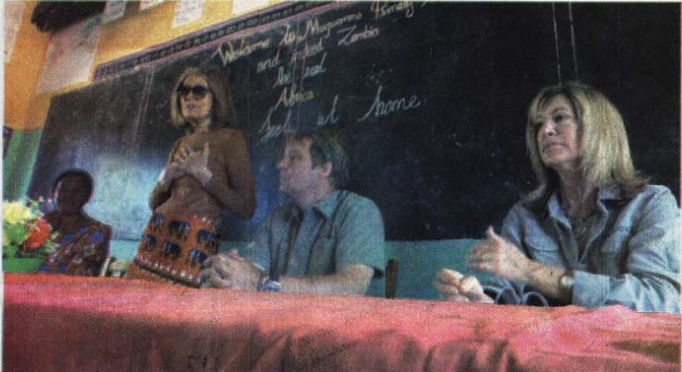
The women in both Maunda and Chiawa villages have pledged not to rest but to continue with the businesses because they have seen the fruits of being economically independent.

Women empowerment has the potential to transform homes as well as transform the nation at large.

The key issue is to encourage women to be active participants in improving their homes, which in turn will benefit the nation.



ONE of the initiatives by Africa Zambia Limited to enhance food security.



FROM right : Cheri Briggs, husband Richard Wilson and Gloria Steinem addressing the beneficiaries of their projects in Chiawa in the Lower Zambezi recently.