



USDOL
EMPOWER
program's first cohort
practice writing in a
classroom in
the Kagoro district.
Photo credit:
Gilles Kasongo

Through USDOL EMPOWER 48-Year- Old Woman Learns to Read and Write



Alice poses for a photo. Kagoro District.
Photo credit: Gillies Kasongo

Meet Alice from Kagoro

Alice's household faces many challenges like any other single woman-headed household in her village. She has been unable to send any of her children to school, so none of them has been

educated. She does not own a farm because within her husband's culture, a woman can only inherit ancestral land from her father, not her husband. Since Alice comes from another tribe, she could not access land for farming despite living within the vicinity.

Most single women in her village own land and can use it to grow crops for subsistence and to sell to earn some money that could be used to support their children in school. As for Alice, she sells fritters for her family's livelihood. Although her eldest son does some bicycle deliveries, his income is inadequate to support Alice, his siblings, wife and children. In the past, Alice avoided participation in other income generating activities or looking for alternative employment as she lacked relevant skills

"BY THE TIME I STARTED ATTENDING CLASSES, I DIDN'T KNOW ANYTHING, BUT THESE FEW WEEKS THAT I HAVE BEEN ATTENDING LESSONS, I HAVE LEARNED HOW TO READ AND WRITE. FOR ME TO KNOW HOW TO READ AND WRITE, I LEARNED FIRST A, E, I, O, U. THAT MADE ME TO BE ABLE TO CONSTRUCT SOME WORDS."

- ALICE

such as reading and writing.

EMPOWER in Kagoro

The community where Alice lives is in one of the villages of the USDOL-funded project called EMPOWER: Increasing Economic and Social Empowerment for Adolescent Girls and Vulnerable Women in Zambia (EMPOWER). Kagoro (located in the Katete District in Eastern Province) is one of the community hubs in which USDOL EMPOWER works. In March 2018, EMPOWER enrolled Alice in the Rural Entrepreneurial and Leadership (REAL) Course curriculum, which includes a 3-month life skills module that provides an hour of functional literacy training as a component of every training session. Alice was identified for the course after her daughter was identified and enrolled in the program based on the project's beneficiary eligibility selection criteria, which prioritizes girls that are in or at risk of child labor, and their households.

EMPOWER's REAL course was piloted in the Kapoko and Kagoro regions of Zambia. Twenty-three girls, 12 women, and seven men participated in the REAL course pilot in the Kapoko region. Twenty-eight girls, 18 women, and five men participated in the Kagoro region. The REAL Course is a yearlong intervention with three components: a 3-month life skills module, a three-month technical/vocational module, and a six-month follow up and mentoring module.

Alice Shares Her Story

After four of 20 REAL course life skills module sessions for women, Alice had a breakthrough addressing her challenges with reading and writing. With excitement, Alice asserted that she can now read and write. She shared how being unable to read and write left her stranded in Lusaka once. "Here I want to share what happened to me last year, I went to Lusaka to visit my brothers but because of not knowing how to read and write, I got

lost and I was kept by the police for three days. All this happened because I didn't know how to read and write to communicate to my brothers. However, from the time I entered the REAL Course at Kagoro and started learning, my eyes and ears started to coordinate and made meaning to me. I learned reading and writing in three weeks, this has been so because my facilitator took keen interest in coaching me."

Alice disclosed that she is living with HIV and learning how to read and write has helped her with her treatments. "One thing that I like about these lessons is that I was not able to know the dates for collecting my drugs from the clinic but after the REAL course training, now I know my dates. I will adhere to my medication because the course has helped me to know the dates of collection for my medications," said Alice, adding that in the past she could not read receipts or hospital documents, nor keep count on her money.

Alice thanks the donor, the US Department of Labor, and Winrock International, for enabling her to read and write at her age. She hopes that this project goes further in improving the lives of many children and women in her community and that she will learn more skills to improve her livelihood.



In USDOL EMPOWER program's first cohort, Mable and Tisaine practice writing in a classroom in the Kagoro district. Photo credit: Gilles Kasongo