



REAL Course Pilot Takes Off

Funded by the United States Department of Labor (USDOL), EMPOWER: Increasing Economic and Social Empowerment for Adolescent Girls and Vulnerable Women in Zambia is a four-year initiative aimed at reducing the prevalence of child labor through interventions that support four outcomes:

- Adolescent girls engaged in or at high risk of entering child labor have increased access to acceptable work and training opportunities;
- Vulnerable women whose households have children engaged in or at high risk of entering child labor have increased livelihood opportunities
- Public awareness of child labor and gender equality is increased; and



USDOL EMPOWER program's first cohort pose for photo. Kagoro district. (All photos: Gilles Kasongo)

- There is greater collaboration between the government and private sector on the promotion of acceptable work for adolescent girls and vulnerable women.

One of the project's key interventions, the Rural Entrepreneurship and Leadership (REAL) course, consists of a progressive set of adapted learning sessions which take participating girls, women and men through active learning and practical application of life and entrepreneurial skills for self and group efficacy and sustainable economic

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activities aimed at preventing child labor. Over the life of the project, EMPOWER will train 2,500 girls, 1,500 women and 1,000 men in the course.

The REAL course starts with a three-month life skills module consisting of 31 sessions broken down into five segments: Knowing Myself, Social Skills, Health and Rights, Employability Skills, and Entrepreneurship Skills. Based on the participants' needs and intended outcomes for the course, girls complete the full life skills package. Women participate in sessions specifically aimed at increasing their awareness of child rights, child labor and gender equality, importance of education and gaining preparatory skills for undertaking sustainable livelihood projects. Men are motivated to complete 12 sessions on child rights, child labor and gender equality. Through selected sessions on entrepreneurial skills, they are led to support the economic pursuits of girls and women and provide the supportive home and community environment for them to succeed in endeavors which ultimately aim to benefit the entire family. Realizing the literacy profile of the participants, an hour of functional literacy skills is built into the course to maximize the participants' abilities to benefit from all course sessions.

Upon completion of the three-month life skills module, girls and women pursue another three months of training in a technical/vocational course. dselected based on the market assessment recommendations and an aptitude assessment. The livelihood projects started during the technical/vocational training are further supported by

six months of intensive follow-on support, in which EMPOWER accompanies girls and women through various mentorship, networking and group-strengthening support, including tie-ups with financial institutions and marketing entities. The first part of the REAL course was piloted in two project hubs: Kapoko in Kasenengwa and Kagoro in Katete, two of the seven target districts of Eastern Zambia from March to June 2018.

USDOL Visits Pilot Areas

EMPOWER's donor, USDOL, visited Kapoko and Kagoro to observe the pilot sessions. Sarah Sunderlin, a USDOL Grants Officer representative from its Bureau of International Labor Affairs (ILAB), was present. USDOL interviewed participants on their interest in the course, how long they plan to be enrolled in the course, and goals upon course completion. Their overall observation and interaction was received positively.



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REAL Course Highlights

In the Kapoko hub, 23 girls, 12 women and seven men participated in the REAL course pilot. In the Kagoro Hub, 28 girls, 18 women and five men participated.

During the USDOL visit, observations of classes and interactions with the three groups of participants demonstrated how they all appreciated their new knowledge and skills, specifically citing their joy in meeting new friends and being accepted in class.

Girls and women were particularly appreciative of their improved ability to read, write and count, as many of them were not able to do so before starting the life skills sessions. Many of them highlighted the impact of the SHAPE sessions (Knowing One's Self, Heart, Abilities, Personality and Experience) where they realized their self-worth and potentials. These sessions opened doors for friendships and sparked interest to pursue dreams for themselves and their families. Many talked about their desire to undertake business projects and gain more employable skills.

"Because of learning about SHAPE, I can now set my goals and know my direction," said Sarah, a girl from Kagoro.

When asked about their new knowledge, participants affirmed the importance of education, and elaborated on the types of labor that should not be allowed for children. They also discussed child rights and the family's role in ensuring them. Men and women said their attendance in the life skills sessions enabled them to discuss these topics at home with their family members.

"From the REAL course, I learned how to save money, budget, and how to spend wisely," said Sharon, a 15-year-old from the Zilole village in Kapoko.

Older women benefited from the course as well. "I want to thank Winrock for giving me an opportunity to learn," said forty-year old Alesi from the Bizalyele village in Kagoro. "I was not able to read or write, but now I am able to. I can even write my name. I have also learned about money and now no one can steal from me when I decide to sell at the market. I am very happy."

Participants Share Their Thoughts

Many participants were glad to disclose how they felt before and after engaging in the REAL course.

Here are a few samples:

"Before the REAL Course we had no idea how best we could look for money but now we understand what is involved in raising money." -Sharon, 17



USDOL EMPOWER's cohort of girls learning in the classroom.

Male participants were also enrolled in the selected sessions of the REAL course pilot. Men shared their thoughts before and after their experience with the course:

“Before EMPOWER, we used to give our children 20-liter containers to go and draw water, but now that we understand what child labor is, we no longer do that.”
-Philip, 37

“I want to testify how the REAL Course has helped my wife, who is also in the program. My wife never knew how to read and write but now she is able to through functional literacy.” -Levison, 40

The EMPOWER life skills module is now ongoing in eight other project hubs, with improved sessions based on the assessment of the pilot hubs. Girls and women who have completed the life skills module in Kapoko and Kagoro are pursuing their livestock production training with government technicians from the Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock. With a positive start through the life skills module, there is much hope that EMPOWER participants will continue to reap the benefits from the REAL course and work together with all project stakeholders toward the effective prevention of child labor.