



# USDOL Project EMPOWERs Woman to Read and Write

## Meet Alice

Like many other single women running a household in Alice, a 48-year-old woman in Kagoro, Zambia, faces many challenges. None of her children have

been educated, as she has been unable to send them to school. Because women in her culture can only inherit ancestral land from their fathers, not their husbands, she does not own a farm. Since Alice comes from another tribe, she could not access land for farming despite living within the village limits.

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**“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.”**

- ALICE



Alice poses for a photo. Kagoro District.  
(All photos: Gillies Kasongo)

Most single women Alice’s village do own land. They can grow subsistence crops to sell, earning money to support their children in school. As for Alice, she sells fritters for her family’s livelihood. Though her eldest son makes bicycle deliveries, his income is not enough support Alice, his siblings, his wife and his children. But Alice’s options were limited. In the past, she avoided other income-generating activities or alternative employment because she lacked relevant skills: reading and writing.

## EMPOWER in Kagoro

Kagoro, located in the Katete District of Zambia's Eastern Province, is a community hub for EMPOWER: Increasing Economic and Social Empowerment for Adolescent Girls and Vulnerable Women in Zambia. This project, funded by the U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL) prioritizes girls that are already in, or at risk of, child labor, along with their households. In March 2018, EMPOWER identified and enrolled Alice's daughter in the Rural Entrepreneurial and Leadership (REAL) Course curriculum. Alice was enrolled shortly after.

EMPOWER's REAL Course, piloted in the Kapoko and Kagoro regions of Zambia, is a yearlong intervention with three components: a three-month life skills module, a three-month technical/vocational module, and a six-month follow-up and mentoring module. Crucially for Alice, the life skills module provides an hour of functional literacy training as a component of every training session. In Kagoro, 28 girls, 18 women, and five men participated in the program; in Kapoko, 23 girls, 12 women, and seven men.

### Alice Shares Her Story

Alice's inability to read and write did not just limit her financial stability; it limited her health and security.

"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," she said. "All this happened because I didn't know how to read and write to communicate to my brothers."

But now, after four of 20 sessions of the REAL Course's life skills module, Alice has experienced a breakthrough in her challenges with reading and writing.

"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," Alice said. "I learned reading and writing in three weeks."

Alice also disclosed that she lives with HIV. Learning how to read and write has helped her with her treatments. She said that in the past, she could not read receipts or hospital documents, or keep count of her money.

"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," she said. "I will adhere to my medication because the course has helped me to know the dates of collection for my medications."

Alice thanks the donor, USDOL, and Winrock International, for enabling her to read and write at her age. She hopes that this project continues to improve 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.