

Mwangaza "Light" Kimachia Empowerment Group, Kenya Partnered with Suncreek UMC, July 2017 – June 2020

A Summary Report on Second Year Groups in Kenya as of May 2019

The following report was written by Kenya staff. It provides an overview of the activities and achievements all 20 groups have experienced during the second year of the Zoe Empowerment Program.

This report covers the activities of 621 heads of households and their families. These households have experienced exponential growth in all facets of life, building on their achievements reported in their first year of the Zoe program in the areas of household economic strengthening, health and hygiene, shelter and care, psycho-social wellbeing, rights protection, and food security.

TRAININGS

Zoe continues to provide trainings to participants in their second year to build upon what they learned in their first year; all is geared towards holistic empowerment. The following trainings were carried out during the last year.

Organic farming and crop rotation. 600 youths from the 20 groups were trained on organic farming, using “green manure”(i.e. cover crops), eco-friendly methods of pest control, and cultivation using natural methods to maintain soil fertility and productivity. Some of the available farming land has been experiencing infertility of the soil due to exploitation and excessive use of fertilizer. Zoe participants were trained to practice crop rotation to reduce soil erosion and increase soil fertility. This training was done early in the month of October 2018 as a pre-cursor to the community planting season.



Advanced record-keeping. All 621 households have experienced significant growth in terms of household income status and household economic strengthening. In the month of August 2018, Zoe provided advanced record-keeping/bookkeeping so that they could properly manage their finances. This included learning to track profit and loss margins and monitor their business growth to continually assess the viability of their businesses.

Training on child rights. Early June 2018, the heads of households and siblings of appropriate age (a total of 750 youths) were trained on child rights protection. The training was carried out in partnership with officers from the Kenyan government. Participants were trained on the rights of children as stipulated in the United Nations

Convention and the Kenyan penal code. It also covered areas of vulnerability especially relevant to orphans such as disinheritance or difficulties in property succession after the death of parents; difficulties in accessing government services due to a lack of identification documents like birth certificates; and vices/practices in the community that endanger the rights of children like FGM (female genital mutilation).

After the training, Zoe participants were empowered to tackle the various challenges surrounding child rights and speak up against the violation of their rights or the rights of others in the community. They are now well aware of the right channels to use in reporting cases of child rights abuse.

Training on table banking. In July 2018, Zoe trained 100 elected leaders from 20 empowerment groups on table banking management. This included how to grow the group's table banking kitty, how to ensure consistent and timely repayments of loans, goal-setting for group table banks, and proper record-keeping. The leaders cascaded the training to other group members and all groups now have strong table bank projects so that members can access soft loans to boost businesses and attend to emergencies or household needs.

Training on savings and investments. In February 2019, Zoe trained the heads of households on the different ways they can save and invest their money to ensure financial stability. These include opening accounts in local banks, taking part in village saving and loaning associations, and using mobile money platforms like MPESA. They were advised to invest in livestock, a method that is embraced and widely practiced in the community as a way to build wealth. Participants were also encouraged to participate in group table banks as avenues for building savings by investing in each other's businesses and to have group merry-go-round projects as a means of saving money to buy things like housewares (utensils, cooking pans, plastic tables and chairs) or small livestock.

Training on money management warned participants about the dangers of going out of their budget or practicing impulse spending. The skills the participants received during this training have spurred tremendous growth on the financial status of these households, meaning the families are able to afford basic needs without working for other people or begging.

FOOD SECURITY

At the group and individual level, Zoe encourages beneficiaries to have both food production and income generation activities to enhance their security. At the group level, 7 groups are keeping pigs, 10 are keeping chicken, and 17 are farming crops like maize, beans, green grams, cow peas, arrowroot, and sorghum. At the individual level, 88% of households are keeping livestock like chicken, goats, rabbits, and cows and 78% of households are growing vegetables gardens in addition to farming crops.



Destiny Ithamore Group members working on their arrowroot farm

Last season, 15 groups experienced a fair harvest both at group and individual levels, this was made possible due to sufficient rainfall unlike the previous year which experienced a drought. As a result, 85% of the households are food secure and are able to have three meals a day of good quality and enough quantity.

INCOME GENERATING ACTIVITIES

After receiving grants in their first year to start various businesses, these heads of households are now enjoying the privilege of a dependable source of income. By accessing low interest, short-term loans from their group table banking projects, 400 youths have boosted their businesses and another 200 have invested in farming and small livestock like pigs, goats, chickens, and rabbits.

496 are running general businesses that are not skills-based:

- 32 members are making traditional porridge and selling both cooked and uncooked porridge
- 89 are selling dry cereal (grains)
- 38 are operating small restaurants that serve an estimate of between 16 to 28 people in a day
- 32 are hawking second hand clothes in the villages
- 33 are selling plastic shoes which are commonly worn by the people in the villages
- 69 are selling fresh fruits
- 96 are operating groceries where they sell fresh farm produce
- 38 are making and selling potato chips
- 29 are selling boiled eggs
- 40 are operating small and medium general stores

200 members are running technical skill-based businesses such as:

- 57 hairdressing salons
- 42 barbers
- 48 tailors/ seamstresses
- 6 carpenters
- 15 masons
- 6 in metal welding and fabrication
- 5 knitting (machine based)
- 16 mechanics
- 5 are electrical wiring installers

20 members have been trained on motorbike riding and supported to acquire appropriate licensing so they can operate taxi and transportation businesses without fear.

HEALTH AND HYGIENE

All 621 households have registered significant improvement in household health and hygiene since they have adopted higher hygiene standards, like properly washing dishes and drying them on a rack in the sun for sanitizing (pictured right). The program facilitators have noted that about 95% of the children now appear well-groomed and healthier and that cases of disease and illness among the households have declined.

Zoe training stressed the importance of having health insurance coverage and then provided support for the most vulnerable 150 to enroll their families in the National Health Insurance Fund (NHIF). An additional 300 have enrolled themselves and their families using proceeds from their



businesses which Zoe helped them start. The combination of having insurance and savings means that 90% of the heads of households and their siblings are now able to access proper medical care when ill.

SHELTER

Home visits have been made by the program facilitator to ensure that all the children have safe and secure houses. During the past two years in the program, the youth have constructed 18 houses, renovated 72 of the homes, and built 66 new latrines. The new homes and renovations have made it possible for siblings who had left due to lack of sufficient shelter to reunite with their families. And the new latrines have helped improve household sanitation and minimize the spread of water-borne diseases. These improvements have been made possible through a combination of resources provided by Zoe, individual business profits, and soft loans from group table banking projects.



The Emmanuel Kanikalchunge Group dedicating newly constructed house

CHILD RIGHTS

After the training on child rights, the youth felt empowered to tackle various challenges that they faced in their day to day lives and to help other vulnerable children in their communities. One way they are working to address issues of abuse is to form champion clubs which take the lead in educating other young people on child rights and how to report abuse. Through group exchange visits the youth learn from one another and through activities like sports and drama clubs girls and boys interact productively thus building confidence.

Zoe also trained community stakeholders, including 60 chiefs and 80 members of the Meru council of elders, on the rights of children and is increasing general awareness through participatory communications (radio, social media). These efforts are meant to create awareness and empower the children themselves to seek accountability from the community and the government.

NETWORKING

Giving back is a big part of Zoe. Empowerment groups are encouraged to become involved in charitable activities, especially those which benefit the less privileged. Such activities include cleaning churches; taking care of orphans; visiting the elderly and abandoned in their communities and sharing food and resources with them; and acting as peer educators on social issues affecting youth like FGM (Female Genital Mutilation).

Neema Kamaroo group members with an elderly lady they support and assist with chores



SPECIAL EVENTS

World AIDS Day - 210 participants from second year groups took part in celebrations to mark World AIDS Day in December 2018. They lent their voice and joined other young people and community stakeholders in speaking up to advocate for more responsible sexual behavior to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS, as well as counter stigma directed towards those infected or affected by HIV/AIDS.

Revival Prayer Meetings - 250 participants attended events facilitated by Zoe in November 2018 and April 2019. Zoe participants from different years came together for fellowship, to study the word of God, and pray. The revival meetings go on for three days and act as a good platform for the participants to experience the love of God and share with others who have been through similar life experiences. This has helped them form strong personal bonds amongst themselves, boosted their self-esteem, and most importantly allowed them to build a relationship with God. Many participants have become dedicated Christians after attending these gatherings.



Zoe participants during a Christian prayer and revival meeting organized by Zoe

The ZOE program facilitator who works directly with your group provided the following write-up about the activities and achievements of a household supported by your partnership. Although each child is unique, most of the children have faced similar challenges and are making comparable progress through the ZOE empowerment model.

Head of Household: Jackson, 18

Dependents: Paris, 13; Eunice (mother)

Challenges: Jackson now lives with his young brother and his sickly mother following the death of his father, at which time he began. He was not willing to disclose the cause of his father's death. Jackson has been taking care of his family after the death of his father. Life before ZOE was really hard for his family. **"Before ZOE, the course of my life was full of suffering,"** he recalls. **"I had to travel a lot between my home and the nearest town, which is a two-hour drive, in order to look for a job and I would never be successful."** Jackson dropped out of school after 8th grade because his mother could not afford to pay for his high school fees.



The issue of food was a big challenge and they would go for a day or two without food. Their neighbors looked down on the family because they would move around the neighborhood begging for food. The family land that they were using for cultivation was taken over by an uncle because Jackson and his family lacked the finances to run the farm. The household also had challenges relating to poor sanitation which led to frequent illnesses such as typhoid. His younger brother had also dropped out of school due to lack of school fees.

The Dream: Training in the Dream process teaches the children how to develop a plan for achieving self-sufficiency and creating a Dream chart provides daily inspiration to work towards the goal. The following are Jackson's most recent responses to the Dream questions:

- **What makes me sad:** Death of his father
- **What makes me happy:** When I am in the group with my group mates
- **What I do not like in my community:** Youths who engage in illegal activities e. g stealing
- **My dream for the future:** To become the main distributor of tomatoes in Meru town
- **Guiding Principles:** Hard work and prayer

Family Specific Achievements Because Of Your Partnership

Income Generation: After the business training ZOE conducted, the family was supported with business funds which Jackson used to hire a half acre of land and start a business of growing tomatoes (pictured right). He is also renting another piece of land where he grows red peppers for sale. The two businesses have enabled him buy **2** dairy goats. Jackson is also among members of the empowerment group who were enrolled on vocational training in carpentry through group savings. He will complete the training in two months' time.

Group Activities: The working group has hired a half acre piece of land where they plant kale. They also have tree nurseries and at the moment they have **2000** tree seedlings of indigenous trees and **1000** macadamia seedlings. They are planning to sell these seedlings in the next rainy season. This last month of June, they have also hired a quarter acre piece of swampy land where they are preparing to plant arrowroots. The arrowroot project will help boost their group income. All these projects have been made possible through group efforts coupled with support they have received from ZOE.



Housing: Jackson has managed to repair their pit latrine, which was in disrepair. He has bought new iron sheets and repaired the walls of the latrine. They now have a hand-washing device outside the toilet as a way of meeting the health and hygiene practices.

Health: The household has been enlightened on basic health and hygiene practices, for example how to do simple hand washing, how to prevent waterborne diseases, importance of boiling drinking water, and the importance of clearing bushes around their homes in order to prevent mosquitoes from breeding. After the trainings, they were given assignments to dig up a compost pit for waste disposal, set up a hand-washing device outside their toilet, as well as construct a simple utensil rack for drying their utensils. Once the family had met these standards, they were supported with a water tank for storing water and **2** blankets.

Other health and hygiene trainings carried out include; trainings on HIV/AIDs where they were sensitized on how to prevent infection as well as case management of HIV/AIDs for those who were already infected, cholera sensitization campaigns, among others, which have had a big impact on the household's empowerment. Jackson was also trained on life skills relevant to the male child and this covered issues like reproductive health, behavioral change among adolescents, abstinence as well as how to deal with peer pressure.



Agricultural Projects and Food Security: The family has been trained on modern agriculture methods as well as agri-business. They now know how to prepare their land for planting, the best seedlings that are fit for their climatic conditions, proper techniques for post-harvest care, as well as importance of planting drought-resistant crops and which ones to plant. Jackson and his siblings were supported with planting seeds, as well as a hoe and machete for use in preparing their land. In addition, the family was enlightened on animal husbandry; how to keep chicken, goats, rabbits and pigs. Jackson has capitalized on this knowledge to enable him to successfully rear his dairy goats without fear of losing them to disease. The goats provide the family with milk and this has helped them in substituting on their diet, hence improving their nutritional uptake.

Child Rights and Protection: Trainings on child rights and child protection, which ZOE conducted, have also been of great help to the household. Jackson and his siblings now know their rights. Through the group, the family has been able to receive psychosocial counseling in cases which they wouldn't have managed on their own.

Education: Through income from his businesses, he has been able to pay school levies for his brother who is in high school. In addition, the family benefitted from school fees support from ZOE earlier on in the year.

Spiritual Strengthening: "Before joining the ZOE program, we never knew the importance of church as well as Christianity. But after attending revivals, this has greatly changed. My family and I are now committed to doing God's work through tithing and helping the poor in my village," Jackson says.

Prayer requests: "Pray for my businesses to flourish so that I can be able to reach out to other less privileged people in my neighborhood."

A Summary Report on First Year Groups in Kenya as of April 2018

The ZOE Kenya staff wrote the following report which provides an overview of the activities and achievements the groups have experienced since their empowerment training began in July 2017.

This report is for the 20 groups that were formed in July 2017 and are now doing their 10th month in the ZOE Kenya program. All 610 households are doing well and are making progress towards empowerment in all facets of life. ZOE had carried out multiple interventions to ensure this.

Trainings

Business start-up and management. At trainings facilitated by ZOE, **608** youth were successfully trained on basic skills for operating a business or an income generating activity. They learnt ways of identifying viable business opportunities and market gaps in their community. They also learnt on how to do simple business plans. The children were taught on record keeping so as to be able to keep track of both profit and loss. They were also sensitized on the need for patience and ploughing back the profits they make into their businesses so as to grow their new businesses.

Health and hygiene. ZOE has facilitated training of **610** heads of households and their siblings on basic health principles and practices. Some of the areas that they were enlightened about include: clearing bushes around their homestead; boiling drinking water and practicing safe storage; washing hands before and after visiting the toilet; drying out utensils in the sun after washing; preparing balanced, well cooked meals for their families; and good grooming techniques. ZOE staff have done continuous follow-up at homes and group level to ensure that the families follow the above teachings to make their lives better.

National health insurance fund awareness creation. ZOE facilitated training aimed at sensitizing households in their first year of the program on the importance of having a health insurance coverage. ZOE encouraged the heads of households to enroll their families in the National Health Insurance which is subsidized by the government, making it cheap and affordable. A government worker from the National Health Insurance office was invited to speak at the trainings. He took 596 heads of households through the details of how NHIF works and how to enroll. ZOE supported **68** families to enroll for the national medical cover by paying a year's worth of premiums and 75 members enrolled their families using money earned from their income projects. This has gone a long way in helping the families access healthcare and treatment when need be, hence ensuring better health and well-being for the households.

Seed selection and farming. ZOE also facilitated trainings on seed selection for youth in all the empowerment groups. They were trained and thereafter supported with different types of planting seeds depending on their region. They were also taught on farming best practices (e. g. crop rotation which is recommended to improve on yield and soil fertility; use of organic and mineral fertilizers as well as other chemical products in terms of quantity, dispersion and timing appropriate to type of crop, etc).



Members of Believers Group after undergoing training on seed selection.

Kitchen gardens. All households were trained on how to start and maintain a kitchen garden. Various techniques for growing vegetables were covered, including Multi Story Gardens(MSG) and other urban farming techniques.

HIV/AIDS. The heads of households were trained and sensitized on the prevention of HIV/AIDS. The trainings were conducted in collaboration with local health practitioners with facilitation from ZOE and gave the young participants a chance to get tested and know their HIV status. **280** youth received Voluntary Testing and Counselling(VCT) services.

Child rights. **600** youth have been trained on child rights, including survival rights (i.e. inheritance), development rights, protection rights, and participation rights. The training was done in collaboration with local government law enforcement agencies. Young participants were empowered with skills to identify abuse and how to report using the relevant channels.

ACTIVITIES IN AREAS OF ZOE EMPOWERMENT, July 2017-April 2018

Food Security

At the time of recruitment, **98%** of the households recruited had challenges relating to food availability and nutrition. Most of the youth were struggling with hunger with a big percentage barely surviving with one meal a day, sometimes compromised on quality and quantity. ZOE supported 600 households with planting seeds to help them grow their own food and start them off on their journey towards food security. These included maize, beans and sweet potato tubers/ cuttings for both group projects and individual farms. They were also supported with farming tools (machetes and hoes). **90%** of households are planting crops, while **78%** percentage of households are keeping livestock. This last season an average of two bags of 90kg of different crops was harvested in most families and families are keeping an average of 2 chicken and 2 rabbits.

In addition to crops, 65% of the households are growing small scale kitchen gardens of green leafy vegetables, onions and indigenous produce. This helps to supplement their nutrition, ensuring their families have enough to eat.



Members of Maendeleo Group with machetes from ZOE to help with land preparation/cultivation.

Each empowerment group was encouraged to have multiple projects geared towards achievement of food security for all the households in the group. These include, **3** groups keeping pigs, **3** groups rearing rabbits, **4** groups have laying chickens, and **17** groups are primarily doing farming. Group projects are of great importance to the members to create an environment for team work. They are also important among group because they challenge and inspire each group to be the best, encouraging innovativeness as well as.

Fifteen groups have come up with very effective food storage methods, which they refer to as food banks. These food banks enable the households to have sufficient food supply even during off season. This season **17** groups experienced only fair harvests both at group and individual levels due to insufficient rainfall.

Income Generating Activities

There are 104 youth that were skilled prior to joining ZOE program who have been supported with start-up kits, while **144** others who had interest in acquiring trade skills have been enrolled in vocational training by apprenticeship. Vocational training includes: **39** in salon, **31** carpentry, **37** tailoring, **18** welding, **8** mechanic, **1** wiring, and **10** in masonry. Those who received their equipment and funds [i.e. start-up kits] have already set up their businesses which are gradually improving: **32** have started hair salons, **16** are doing carpentry, **25** are doing tailoring, **8** are doing welding, **1** is running a mechanics business, **18** are running barber shops, **1** is doing masonry, and **3** are doing electrical wiring and installation.

The rest of the heads of household, having been trained to identify viable business concepts/ideas in their community, have submitted a business proposal to their group and were supported with start-up capital for individual income generating activities. Business started include: **68** selling groceries, **63** running general shops/kiosks, **54** making and selling porridge, **54** selling boiled eggs, **53** making and selling potato chips, **32** selling fruits, **59** buying and selling cereals, **9** hawking second hand clothes. To the right are first year participants after receiving equipment to start businesses.

All 20 empowerment groups have already started table banking projects. Every month, group members each contribute a set amount of money - between Ksh 50 and Ksh 120 (\$0.50 to \$1.20) which is immediately made available

for loans. ZOE program facilitators ensure the group participants keep proper records of this project by checking the table banking record book during every group visit. The groups are also running merry-go-round projects where they contribute Ksh 50 every week. The groups do not give money directly to members but instead use the money in lump sum to buy them something that is essential to the livelihood of the household like kitchen utensils, plastic chairs, or small livestock.

Health and Hygiene

In general, there is a notable change in dressing and grooming habits among about 90% of the children and as a result there is significant reduction in cases of common illnesses like typhoid, skin infections, diarrhea, and malaria. At the time of recruitment, it was noted with concern that many of the young girls had their own children. To address this issue, ZOE staff underscored the effects of early pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections. They are also providing continuous guidance and counselling to the girls.



After undergoing training on health and hygiene, all households received water tanks and blankets. The tanks have provided safe storage for water for domestic use. (Mwangaza Group pictured above.)

Group members support each other to make household health improvement by providing labor, encouragement and access to micro-loans from group funds. Projects they have completed include: **539** dish drying and storage racks, **380** compost pits for waste disposal, **11** new pit latrines, **20** repaired houses, and **4** new homes constructed. Additionally **10** household installed piped water which is safe, sufficient and efficient for domestic and farming use.

Child protection

Early pregnancies, forced marriages and FGM [female genital mutilation] remain major problems in Meru County and often compromise girls' education. The ZOE program in Kenya has been on the forefront in creating community awareness on these issues. After the training, participants developed and disseminated materials on child abuse and exploitation.

The program has also put in place Interventions aimed at addressing factors that cause children to drop out of school. ZOE has promoted the importance of primary school enrollment and retention through the provision of school uniforms to **240** OVC (**145** girls and **95** boys). In addition, 60 other children have been reintegrated back to school as a result of household economic strengthening initiatives supported by ZOE. ZOE paid school fees for **100** youth who had dropped out of school. Those that were on and off attending school now have more stabilized school attendance patterns. This has resulted in significant improvements in their school performance.

Networking

The members of the groups are interacting as a family and learning to identify with each other as brothers and sisters with common backgrounds and similar interests. Each household has benefited from mutual help activities whereby members in the group support each other by helping one another with land cultivation and house hold tasks. They also extend their love to the community by visiting and praying with the sick, orphaned, and elderly. Their lives have really changed because of mutual support they have accorded each other.

Peer learning on child rights, FGM, HIV/AIDS, early marriages, and other areas of interest has also been facilitated through inter-exchange visits among groups and other communities. Activities like dancing groups, football clubs, and champion clubs that keep girls and boys engaged productively have increased their confidence and knowledge around these issues, empowering them to be advocates among their peers and in their local communities.

Special events:

Revivals: 390 youth from households attended Christian revival fellowship meetings made available through ZOE in all regions during the month of December. This event also served as a convention for the young participants to learn from each other, socialize, and fellowship together with others from different ZOE empowerment groups. Their lives have changed for the better, owing to the spiritual nourishment acquired from the revival meetings and regular prayer sessions during group meetings and regional meetings facilitated by ZOE. They are learning to accept themselves and have a more positive outlook towards life. They now take pride in the fact that they have a heavenly father who is a father to all, including those without parents, and are confident they can depend on him for everything.

World Aids Day: On December 1, 2017, 210 ZOE youth took action to mark the International World Aids Day. Prior to the celebrations, youth received training and sensitization around the issue of HIV/AIDS, empowering them to carry out advocacy towards the prevention of HIV infection and against stigmatization of those living with the virus.

Christmas celebrations: During December, each of the 20 empowerment groups held Christmas celebrations at the group level. The heads of households came together with their families to share food and celebrate the birth of Christ, inviting less fortunate members of their community as well.

Peace concert: In July 2017, 250 youth took part in a peace concert right before Kenya went to the polls. Young participants from the ZOE program served as advocates for peaceful elections and spoke out against youth being used by politicians to perpetrate elections offences and violence.



ZOE young participants during a procession just before the peace concert in July.

Name List: Before an empowerment group name list is created, ZOE staff members take time to get to know the youth. They make home visits to record information about the children, their dependents, and caregivers. They assess if any emergency interventions are required to alleviate health issues, abusive conditions, or inadequate shelter. Once they have confirmed who is eligible for the ZOE program, and have allowed time for children who are not interested to drop out and others to join, then the staff creates the name list. Please note, children joining the ZOE program often have no parents or birth documentation, and have suffered multiple traumas in their young lives. Sometimes they are suspicious of the outsiders asking questions. For these reasons, the children occasionally provide erroneous information which we later correct.

On the following page is the list of names and a picture of your specific group. The names in bold are heads of household, followed by their siblings and dependents. Although ZOE records both first and second names, we use only first names in public lists to preserve the privacy of children in the program. The ages of the orphans and vulnerable children in the ZOE program range between infant and college age; however, the youth who is the head of household must be old enough to manage a small business and so is usually between 14 and 21 years old.

Some of the children live with an elderly grandparent or disabled caregiver. Most often such arrangements include shelter only and the caregiver is unable to provide food, education, health care or other support which children need. Child rights are especially important in such situations so that the children are not abused.

The children are encouraged and strengthened by the knowledge that their partner, a ZOE Angel Investor, is not only supporting them with resources, but also with prayer and in the belief that they are capable of great things. Thank you for making this journey of transformation with them.



Mwangaza "Light" Kimachia Group, Kenya

30 households and a total of 100 children



Judith (f) 19

Enock (m) 15
Patrick (m) 13
Glory (f) 11
Juster (f) 7

Joy (f) 18

Alex (m) 7
Esther (f) 2
Agnes (f) 15

Rodah (f) 18

Brenda (f) 7
Maxwel (m) 13
Purity (f) 19

Dorothy (f) 19

Enock (m) 7
Abineiri (m) infant

Charity (f) 18

Peter (m) 17
Pius (m) 7

Erick (m) 19

Phineas (m) 15

Monica (f) 19

Cliphod (m) infant
Evan (m) 2

Betty (f)

Liticus (m) 5
Kelvin (m) 4
Joseph (m) 1

Pamela (f) 18

Roman (m) 12

Martha (f) 18

Patrick (m) 19
Felix (m) 7
Emmaculate (f) 5
Risper (f) 2

Jackson (m) 18

Paris (m) 13

Antony (m) 18

Josphat (m) 18
Nicolas (m) 14

Fridah (f) 19

Levi (m) 3

Gladys (f) 18

John (m) 15
Phineas (m) 12
Wendy (f) 11
Risper (f) 6

Grace (f) 19

Solomon (m) 15
Duncan (m) 13
Jesil (m) 11
Sharon (f) 8
Glory (f) 4

Fredrick (m) 18

Morine (f) 3
Dennis (m) 5

Kelvin (m) 18

Edwin (m) 8
Linet (f) 6
John (m) 13

Jackson (m) 18

Enock (m) 15

James (m) 18

Purity (f) 14
Isaiah (m) 8

Edward (m) 19

Linda (f) 15

Colins (m) 14

Davis (m) 11
Winfred (f) 11
Isaac (m) 5

Edward (m) 18

Phineas (m) 15
Elosy (f) 12
Mitchelle (f) 8

Bridget (f) 17

Wendy (f) 12
Fredrick (m) 7
Evans (m) infant

Rose (f) 20

Besy (f) 17

Denis (m) 13
Wendy (f) 4
Caigle (f) infant
Precious (f) 1

Rosemary (f) 19

Fridah (f) 13

Beatrice (f) 19

Benard (m) 17
Sharon (f) 5

Harison (m) 18

Caty (f) 11

Halima (f) 20

Pintonius (m) 14
Zamzam (m) 12
Sarah (f) 4
Princess (f) 2
Abdi (m) 3

Velocity (f) 19

Shantel (f) 2

Pictures taken during a first group meeting of the heads of households.



The following is an overview of how ZOE empowers orphans and vulnerable children to move beyond the need for charity by comprehensively addressing the multiple challenges faced by those in living in extreme poverty.

Group Formation

When ZOE first enters a community to help children, we begin by engaging the local leaders. Staff members explain how ZOE is an empowerment program, enabling children to move from crippling poverty and dependency to economic and social self-sufficiency. Although different from the usual relief approach, it resonates with leaders who want to see sustainable change in their village. Since staff are indigenous to each country in which ZOE operates they understand local customs, challenges, and resources available.

During the first meeting the youth elect leaders, make rules to guide their meetings, choose a group name, and decide when and where to hold weekly gatherings. To strengthen peer bonds, groups begin shared income activities and agricultural projects. Nearly all groups immediately establish a “merry-go-round” fund to encourage meeting attendance and provide financial benefits. During meetings, group members contribute a small amount into a single pool of money which is then given in full to a different member each time. A variation involves saving the money until there is enough to make bulk purchases of small livestock, groceries, or housewares to be distributed to each member.

The youth complete training on topics of food security, health and disease prevention, business management, and child rights within the first six months. If they have access to land they receive seeds to start gardens and plant crops. If siblings are not attending school, ZOE provides uniforms and other resources to get them back into classes. Children who have skills are provided grants so that they can start small businesses, others begin vocational training. Most importantly, all begin to experience God’s love and they realize that though many are orphans, they have a Father in heaven who loves them.

The Dream

One of the first tasks new members complete is the creation of their “Dream” chart. Most orphans and vulnerable children entering the ZOE empowerment program face a daily struggle to survive; there is neither time to think about the future nor reason to hope for something better. But through ZOE and your partnership, the children learn to imagine a new life and prepare to make it a reality.

The ZOE program facilitator leads members through an exercise called the Dream process where they examine their current situation and then set their goals. After considering their family’s hopes and needs, the youth who is considered the head of the household and is the primary member of their empowerment group creates a poster of responses to a standard set of questions.



This youth then presents the Dream to the rest of the group members who express support and give feedback, especially concerning the primary goal. These Dream documents help the program facilitators better understand the conditions of the children’s lives so they can address specific needs or traumas suffered. The family keeps a copy of their Dream, often displaying it in their home to provide daily motivation as they strive to create their new life. As they progress through the empowerment program they will often update their Dream.

Connections

One of the biggest disadvantages orphans and vulnerable children face is isolation from peers and the larger community. Struggling on their own, the children lack moral support, access to community resources, and a network of people to help them progress and face challenges. ZOE creates connections.

Peer group. The youth served by ZOE have often dropped out of school and stopped attending church or community events. They do not even realize how many others share their plight, but at the first group meeting, when each new member tells their story, the bonding process begins. By working together on group projects and helping each other make improvements to their homes, friendships form and the group becomes an extended family committed to helping each other face challenges and achieve their dreams. New ZOE group members are also introduced to youth who have graduated from ZOE or been a member of another group for a couple years. These relationships provide advice based on experience, networking possibilities, and inspiration.

Program facilitator and mentor. ZOE program facilitators usually hold a diploma in social work or related fields and have experience working with children. They care deeply about the children and are available to provide counseling as needed, but they do not fill a role of guardian nor do they attend all the group meetings. This is important so that the youth develop their own problem solving abilities and can become fully self-reliant. Each group has a local mentor which they select to help represent and guide the group within their community. Mentors receive training from ZOE and then attend weekly meetings, make home visits, and help resolve challenges in the community.

Community leaders and government officials. This includes school administrators to help children return to classes; local leaders who can address cases of abuse and improperly seized property; government officials and specialists who can provide expert advice on business development, agriculture and higher education; and health service providers.

And a powerful connection is you! All ZOE groups know the opportunities they receive are from God, through the love and concern coming from their partners far away. They are amazed that you would care for them without ever having met them. This powerful connection is further strengthened if a partner can visit the country to witness what the youth have achieved.

Child Rights

A major focus of ZOE's empowerment program is teaching children about the rights their local government and international laws promise. Such training is often conducted by the local officials in charge of enforcing child rights so the children get to know those who are responsible for their protection. Additionally, ZOE's group-based model creates crowd support through which the youth can defend each other from all forms of abuse; physical, financial or emotional.

In the many communities where ZOE works, young girls are particularly vulnerable to abuse and often feel they are powerless to resist. Protecting the rights of girls includes educating the entire community about the dangers and harm inherent in all forms of mistreatment, especially child marriage, sex trafficking, and female genital mutilation. ZOE's emphasis on forming gender-mixed groups strengthens the support available to girls within their groups and creates leaders who will encourage fair and just treatment for all.

ZOE's goal is to ensure that all children are able to stand up for themselves and their rights in the community. Often children in the ZOE group learn these lessons so well that they not only defend their own rights, but also the rights of others who may be abused or neglected in their communities.

Food Security

Children entering the ZOE empowerment program struggle every day to alleviate their hunger. Usually they try to find work, but because they lack status or an adult advocate in their community, they are paid extremely low wages or small amounts of food. They might try growing their own food, but they do not have the resources or knowledge to succeed. It is not unusual for these children to go two or three days without eating. Occasionally they must resort to begging or even taking from a neighbor's field just to survive. Even those children who do manage to eat daily suffer health consequences from the poor nutritional quality of their meals.

With guidance from ZOE program facilitators, new groups learn what foods they need to eat as well as explore different ways to attain a stable food source. Because ZOE is an empowerment program, the children are not told what to do, but are instead given options and training so that they can devise their own approach to becoming food secure and self-sufficient.

Children in rural areas who can access land will learn about the best agricultural practices for their region and then be given the seeds, fertilizer, and tools to begin vegetable gardens and/or plant crops like corn. Other ZOE households might start with raising small animals, like rabbits or chickens, after learning about animal husbandry. All children are encouraged to begin earning money as soon as possible to increase their food security.

Income Generation

ZOE helps the children generate an income at both the group and household level. A group project might involve growing a cash crop, raising small livestock, or producing and selling a product like soap. These projects provide experience, foster group cohesion, and produce profits for the group's savings and loan fund. Individual households also start small income generating-activities like buying and reselling food items, phone calling cards, clothing, etc. Some youth who are already skilled immediately receive resources to begin businesses in trades like tailoring, auto mechanics, or hairstyling. ZOE urges youth to continue growing their wealth and financial security by completing vocational training, expanding their business into new markets, or starting multiple businesses.

Before distributing resources, ZOE trains all empowerment group members on how to craft a business plan and manage money. After this training, the group members take the following steps:

- Brainstorm what businesses could succeed in their community
- Create individual and group business plans and present these to the group for discussion
- Vote to approve the proposals or help the members create a better plan

Once the business plan is approved, the individual receives a micro-grant and/or a start-up kit. Throughout this process the ZOE program facilitator is available to provide guidance but does not tell the group what to do or make decisions for them. If a poor decision is made, the youth will learn from the experience, but still have the support of their group and ZOE to try again.

To provide money for business expansion and also generate group income, many groups establish "table banks." Members start the fund by all contributing a set amount of money which is immediately made available for short term loans with the interest paid up front. This pre-paid interest is also available for loans. The fund grows fast.

Some groups pay dividends to all members, others use it for something that benefits the whole group like their Christmas party.

Health and Disease Prevention

ZOE's goal is to address immediate health needs, teach the children how to live healthy lives, and connect them to medical resources. Preventative education includes:

- Basic hygiene practices such as hand washing, boiling water, and keep their home and surroundings clean
- Nutrition, especially important since the children have often had very limited diets
- Diseases transmission and treatment; especially for malaria and HIV/AIDS
- Dangers of substance abuse
- Specialized training for girls' personal health and safety

Many of the children have lost a parent to HIV infection and often the children too are suffering from the virus. Because of the associated stigma, they are usually reluctant to discuss their status and sometimes even avoid treatment. ZOE provides supportive opportunities for children to be tested, helps them access medications, and educates to counter the many misconceptions held in the community.

After youth achieve basic health and hygiene standards in their homes, ZOE provides the first distribution of items like mosquito nets, sleeping mats, blankets, and hygiene products. ZOE helps families enroll in health insurance plans and/or access medical care by providing assistance. For continued self-care, the youth learn to budget their own money for insurance, emergencies, and health related products.

Training also includes teaching the children about the importance of improving their physical appearance and keeping their home clean and attractive in order to increase their status in the community. When the children look "smart" their confidence increases, they feel better about themselves, and others in the community begin treating them with respect and acceptance. In the second and third years of the program it is possible to pick out the once-ragged ZOE children because they are often the cleanest looking children in the village and carry themselves with pride and dignity.

Housing

Often, children entering ZOE are living in houses left by their deceased parents that are in disrepair. At other times the orphans and vulnerable children work in exchange for a room, this leaves them vulnerable to abuse and with little time for other activities or to earn money for food. ZOE does not provide housing for the children, but it does give the group funds which they can use to help out those members in greatest need by providing temporary rent assistance or materials to make emergency repairs. Individually, the youth save money to improve their housing and the group provides labor assistance as needed. In some areas ZOE is able to partner with local governments or villages to find housing for these children or to supply land and other resources. ZOE's emphasis is on helping the children find appropriate housing while also teaching them how to save money to repair or purchase their own home. Sometimes this means they move in with another group member or find a reasonable renting situation while they save profits from businesses to buy land and build their own home.

Education

ZOE does not need to teach the children and young caregivers who join empowerment groups about the importance of education. These children desperately want to attend school. Prior to joining ZOE, many children participated in school, but were forced to drop out due to chronic illness, hunger, social ostracism, lack of clothing, and/or lack of

money. Once in the program, the young heads of households (many of whom have been out of the educational system for too long to be reintegrated) are eager to see their younger siblings back in school as soon as possible.

So that children can quickly return to school, ZOE will meet with school administrators and assist with some of the expenses such as uniforms, fees, and materials. The group may also pay for some of these materials when there is a special need. As with all other aspects of the ZOE program, the emphasis is on empowering the children to pay for their own educational expenses. It is a great source of pride and self-esteem for the youth who are the heads of their households to be able to share how they are able to work to send their younger siblings to school. It is like hearing parents brag about the accomplishments of their children and it is very moving to see in a sibling.

Faith

Often the isolation that the children feel when they begin the ZOE program extends to their thoughts about God. Because they are abused and discriminated against by their community - and often this includes Christians in their village - they believe God has also abandoned or even cursed them. At other times they believe that maybe God does not exist, or if God does exist that they are somehow beyond God's love. In the very first meeting a ZOE staff member often shares the Lord's Prayer with the children, and talk about how they are not truly orphans because they have their heavenly Father who loves them.

Meetings begin with Scripture readings, prayer, and devotions led by a group member, but while this is available to the children they are never coerced into the Christian faith. ZOE's program is religiously non-restrictive, yet offers a compelling view of the love Christians show to others. One of the most powerful parts of the empowerment program is the way these children put their faith into action in their own community. They forgive those who have harmed them; feed others who are even poorer than themselves; adopt other children and share their resources and knowledge with them; pray and care for one another; and pay fair wages to those who had once taken advantage of their situation with hard labor and poor pay. These children return good for evil and can be examples to all of what it means to live as Christians.