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EQUIPPING A GIRL-CHILD WITH CLIMATE RESILIENCE SKILLS

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About People's Action Forum

Peoples Action Forum (PAF) is an indigenous organization that has supported rural communities and schools in Zambia since 1994 through community learning centres established in seven rural districts of Eastern (Chadiza, Chipata, Mambwe), Southern (Mazabuka, Monze), and Central (Mumbwa, Namayani) Provinces. PAF has provided direct project support to schools in 14 other districts of Chipangali, Isoka, Kafue, Kalomo, Kapiri Mposhi, Kasama, Kasenengwa, Kawambwa, Mbala, Mpulungu, Mungwi, Namwala, Solwezi, Vubwi.

OUR VISION

A peaceful society where people are empowered and have attained equity.

OUR MISSION

To promote empowerment through advocacy, education and other innovative approaches for sustainable development



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Kalonga Community School Expanding

(From left to right) Ms Leah Nguni, Ms Eneless Daka, Ms Chipo Zulu, Ms Amy Zavitz, Ms Gina Chiwela, Ms Sibanda Ngandu and Ms Janet Nyoni, pose in front of the classroom block under construction

Kalonga Community School has continued growing bigger over the past years to meet the ever increasing demand for learning opportunities in Chief Mwanachingwala area in Mazabuka. The school, initiated and built by People's Action Forum (PAF), has a new classroom block under construction in partnership with the United Church of Canada (UCC). According to the head teacher, Sibanda Ngandu, the school is currently over enrolled, a situation that has affected effective learning and teaching. "The teacher to learner ratio is bad as all the classes are way above the forty-five learners per class standard. Teachers are experiencing enormous challenges to give individual attention to slow learners because of the bloated classes. "For example, our grade2 class has 68 learners of which 36 are girls. These are beginners who need individual attention but it's extremely difficult to employ the approach," Ms Ngandu said.

However, Ms. Ngandu is happy that a classroom has been added to the school, "I have a sigh of relief now that we have one more classroom that will help to reduce the congestion." Ms Ngandu was speaking when UCC Global Partnership Program Coordinator for Southern Africa / South East Asia, Amy Zavitz visited the school during her familiarization tour of PAF projects funded by UCC.

"The Classroom block will Shore up the Infrastructure Deficit the school was facing"

The head teacher told the entourage led by PAF Executive Director, Gina Chiwela and Programme Manager, Janet Nyoni that the construction of the classroom has come at a time when enrollment figures have soared to an all time high due to the free education policy the government has implemented.

Ms. Ngandu said the classroom will build the school's capacity to handle the excess learners who have seized the free education policy opportunity. Meanwhile, Ms. Zavitz was impressed with the school's efforts towards meeting educational needs for the children who otherwise would have been out of school. "It's gratifying to hear that learners at this school have good scores in national examinations. We appreciate such efforts and urge you to continue making significant strides in building the future of these children," Ms. Zavitz said. Kalonga was established in 2012 with a 1x 2 classroom block. Currently, a total school enrollment of 354 learners (191 girls) share the two classrooms. In 2019, a classroom for Early Child Care Education (ECCE) was constructed, and it's accommodating 31 infants. With UCC support, the ECCE class was boosted with learning and teaching aids which included charts, books, jigsaw puzzles and other games.

EQUIPPING A GIRL-CHILD WITH CLIMATE RESILIENCE SKILLS



Learners at Chobana Community School implementing the CSA skills and techniques in the garden

Girls' education is often the first thing families sacrifice when faced with the impacts of climate crisis. Girls are pulled out of school to help their families find food and water or take care of siblings.

Yet, education gives girls the skills and knowledge to respond to climate-related disasters and to the changing resource landscapes around them. The contributions of educated girls to their communities increases a community's overall resilience to climate shocks.

Understanding the critical role education plays in responding to the effects of climate change, People's Action Forum (PAF) is creating an enabling environment to keep a girl child in school. PAF has drilled boreholes and installed solar powered water reticulation systems in some schools in Mazabuka District. The water infrastructure in the schools is meant to meet the girls' practical need for water and sanitation while the surrounding communities are utilizing the facilities to engage in water dependent livelihoods such as gardening.

Chobana Community School, is one of the rural learning institutions which has benefitted from the PAF water project. School head teacher, Hillary Natala confirmed the improved girls' retention in the school adding that the water facility has improved class attendance from the time the project was undertaken.

"Before the water infrastructure was installed, the school experienced high levels of absenteeism with the responsibility of fetching water being the main contributing factor especially among the girls.

"Now that is history. We have water in the school and the communities in the neighborhood have access to adequate clean water which they even use in their gardens to generate income to meet the educational needs of their children among other rudiments."

Esnart Mutinta, 12, is happy that she now has ample time for school as she no longer walks kilometers to fetch water.

Additionally, Esnart was one of the learners who were trained in Climate Smart Agriculture (CSA) and acquired skills and knowledge in drip irrigation, water conservation, crop diversification and inter-cropping.

As a member of the Girls' Action Forum (GAF) in the school, Esnart has developed self-esteem and believes that she is capable of living a productive life in a changing climate.

"In GAF we also learn of diversified livelihoods such as knitting, baking and gardening. We understand that climate change has affected rainfall patterns leading to unstable precipitation. We should, therefore, plant drought resistant crops which do not need much water," Esnart explained.

She said being in school has helped her to learn how to cope better with drought and other climate change shocks.

“Positioning
Learners
to Adopt
Smart Farming
at an
Early Age”



Gift Mweemba explaining inter-cropping method to the DAO, Mr Mulenga

CHILDREN SHOWCASE THEIR POTENTIAL AS THE FUTURE OF FOOD SECURITY

Children in Mazabuka have practically demonstrated that they have the potential to sustain food security through Climate Smart Agriculture (CSA).

During an exhibition held at Royal Laricio Lodge for schools that were trained in CSA, ten learners from Kalonga, Chobaana, St Michael, Nanga Special and Kachembe showcased their skills and knowledge acquired by ably explaining and practically demonstrating how smart farming can enhance productivity in a changing climate.

Nanga Special School (a school for children with special education needs) took the centre stage as Gift Mweemba succinctly took the judges through the pillars of CSA and how the techniques can help build climate resilience and raise good yields.

Gift, a visually challenged learner, won the heart of the Guest of Honour, Mazabuka District Administration Officer, Timothy Mulenga who spent a little more time at the school's stand to appreciate the input of physically disadvantaged children in agriculture.

Gift explained the multiple benefits CSA has to a farmer in the time of climate change.

“One of the notable advantages of CSA is that it boosts productivity and income. On a small piece of land, the yields are higher than on the same size of land where conventional method is practiced,” Gift explained.

He said the school is practicing inter cropping which is better than mono-culture farming.

“With this practice, when one crop fails, you benefit from the secondary crop. The other advantage is that a small piece of land is utilised to the maximum by using every space,” Gift said.

Gift further highlighted the aspect of protection of crops against pests when practicing inter-cropping, “In this model we are exhibiting, we have cabbage and onion. The onion is serving as a repellent to pests which attack cabbages. By this, we avoid using pesticide chemicals as they have an effect on the environment.”

Nanga have embraced CSA after receiving a training conducted by PAF with technical support from the Department of Agriculture.

And speaking during prize presentation ceremony, Mr. Mulenga was happy that PAF's programmes were inclusive.

“Sustainable Food Security must be inclusive if we want to eradicate hunger. All of us should participate regardless of the physical status.”

PHOTO FOCUS



1. Chobaana learners having a taste of piped water
2. PAF monitoring team in the Hanjalika School Smart Garden
3. Dr Mwaba (checked shirt) giving a Covid-19 talk to learners at Lubombo Combined School
4. CSA Exhibitors pose for a group photo with Mazabuka District Administration
5. Agriculture Extension Officer, Mr Kasongo making a CSA demonstration at Nanga Special School during the training
6. Chobaana Community School head teacher, Mr Nataala talking about smart gardening program to Amy Zavitz

PHOTO FOCUS



7. A learner at Chobaana spraying in the garden 8 & 9. Learners at Nanga Special School working in the garden
10. Mazabuka DAO, Mr Timothy Mulenga handing over a trophy to Chobaana Community School learner during a CSA Exhibition & Quiz 11. Magoye Combined School GAF members display their works at a Mentorship Talk
12. PAF monitoring team with some learners and teachers at Nega-nega Community School 13. A learner at Nanga Special taking his turn to demonstrate basin making during a CSA Training



(From left) Ms Nyoni explaining to the DC, Mr Mulomba in the company of Ms Chiwela and Ms Amy Zavitz at the Dc's office

Government Showers Praise on PAF, UCC

Mazabuka District Commissioner, Oliver Mulomba has applauded People's Action Forum (PAF) for uplifting schools' learning environment in the district.

Mr Mulomba said PAF has made milestone contributions to providing quality and equitable education through construction of water and sanitary infrastructure, schools and classroom blocks in Mazabuka.

Speaking when the UCC's (United Church of Canada) Amy Zavitz paid a courtesy call on him, Mr Mulomba said PAF has supported Government's efforts to create an enabling learning environment for learners in the rural schools.

"Organisations such as PAF have progressive projects which are reducing education inequalities in Mazabuka. We have seen rural schools having piped water, flush toilets and standard classrooms.

"These facilities are yielding positive academic performance, giving rural children a fair shot and equal opportunities for personal and career growth development," Mr Mulomba said. He pledged government's support to all the programmes PAF is undertaking in the district.

"As a government with an open-door policy, you are free to come to this office and share with us information and ideas about development. We shall support all your programmes and ensure that you continue operating in Mazabuka." Meanwhile, Ms Zavitz underscored the Church's commitment to improving the learning environment for underprivileged children in rural areas.

She was happy that Government has recognised the efforts PAF was making to promote education and rural community development in the district.

CREATIVE THINKING IN A CHANGING CLIMATE

“We have improvised Drip Irrigation System to Increase Productivity in the Face of Water Stress”

Climate change has introduced a number of pressing issues concerning water availability and predictability around the world. Old irrigation practices such as flooding fields are outdated and wasteful, in fact in this time of water scarcity due to reduced rainfall, they are not effective. And in this time of climate change, adapting to new farming technologies and methods is key to increased food production. While the old generation is resistant to change, the young generation is receptive and curious to try the new farming techniques. Following a Climate Smart Agriculture training conducted by People's Action Forum (PAF), learners at Kachembele Primary School have embraced the necessity of utilizing environmentally friendly agricultural practices, such as drip irrigation. The learners received training in drip irrigation, methods for better water



Inness Kaembe and John Hang'andu filling water in the bottles in the garden

management, and sustainable strategies to improve the productivity of crops in their small school garden. Owing to inadequate resources, the school has no capacity to acquire modern drip irrigation equipment. The challenge posed by inadequate resources has triggered critical and creative thinking among the learners who have used local materials to make a drip irrigation system for their school garden. The learners collect used juice drink bottles, make a small hole at the bottom to allow water to drip out slowly.

The bottles are hung to a pole above the plants supplying each one with water much the same way a drip pipe would. Innes Kasembe, a 7th grade learner, said the improvised irrigation system is an initiative of the learners. “Watering by this method is easier, uses less water and gives us enough time for studies. Once filled with water, a 750 ml bottle lasts for three days,” Innes said. Last year, the school harvested 13 bags of potatoes from the garden. By press time, the garden had Chinese Cabbage and Rape (popular local leafy greens) in the garden.



GAF members display their works after the mentorship talk at Lubombo Combined School

HALWIINDI INSPIRES GIRLS TO DREAM BIG

For rural girls, choosing an appropriate career can be a dilemma. Disadvantaged by their geographical location and information divide, adolescent rural girls have been forced to enter into either teaching or nursing profession, these being the only career options they are exposed to during their academic course.

To help break career barriers which impede a girl child's transition from school to college, People's Action Forum (PAF), organizes mentorship sessions for girls in rural schools. During these sessions, high profile female models have given motivation talks for the girls, inspiring them to aspire for

professions deemed elite and for the urban girls. Lubombo Combined School, is one of the schools where PAF held a mentorship talk, conducted by Nkolola Halwiindi, a journalist who plied her trade in South Africa before returning to Zambia and where decided to go farming. Before delving into the talk session, each girl was asked their career preference after completion of secondary school. As expected, teaching and nursing careers accounted for about 80% of the girls' job options. Ms Halwiindi shared with the girls, her academic progression, how and why she chose journalism as a career. She implored the girls to work hard for best results if they were to realise their dreams of a job of their choice. "Good academic results are an important element of achieving your dream job. You must show your potential employer that you have the necessary results for the job. Therefore, education is the key to your success. "You should also identify your personal values and ideals. These will help you to focus on what you are really passionate about," Mrs Halwiindi told the girls. She further counseled them to avoid falling prey to peer pressure. "You must carefully choose the friends you would like to associate with in school and anywhere else. Some of the learners in the school have bad influence which can destroy your future." After the talk, the girls displayed their door mart making skills they have acquired through Girls' Action Forum (GAF) programme.



GAF members at Magoye Combined School

Hanjalika School Adopts Smart Gardening



Some learners working in the school garden

Motivated by the Climate Smart Agriculture (CSA) training and Starter Pack grant, Hanjalika Primary School has established a smart vegetable garden. School focal person, Billy Mumba said the garden is serving as a demonstration to show how CSA techniques improve productivity and income in a changing climate. Mr Mumba said the learners are curious and eager to explore and replicate the techniques in their household gardens. “The learners are excited and some have confirmed sharing what they learnt during the training with their parents. This is a positive development in Hanjalika area because when the parents adopt the smart farming methods, household food security will be guaranteed,” Mr Mumba said.

He thanked PAF and UCC for empowering the future generation with information and skills to boost food production and reduce poverty in rural communities. And one of the learners, Mweemba Cheelo said she was delighted to have been trained and learnt different methods of farming. “The method where you make basins for a plant has less labour compared to digging the whole field. CSA has made farming easy and enjoyable,” Mweemba said. Mweemba disclosed that she has shared with her parents the climate gardening ways adding that they are willing to try the CSA approach.

