

THE SINGLE REFUGEE MOTHERS EMPOWERMENT INNOVATION (SIREMEI)

Refugee student

CHRONICLE

Refugees are persons who are outside their country of origin for reasons of feared persecution, conflict, generalized violence, or other circumstances that have seriously disturbed public order and, as a result, require international protection. During the years 1974 and 1975, the impending independence of Angola led to the Angolan civil war that grew into a Cold War competition. This infamous war led to massive destruction and forced so many Angolans to migrate to the neighbouring countries including Zambia while leaving their jobs, investments, and properties behind. Many Angolans entered the Republic of Zambia through the Jumbe border post and other areas along the two national borders and since then, there are still Angolans refugees living in the Meheba refugee camp in Kalumbila district, northwestern province, Zambia.

PROBLEM



There are several challenges that the Angolan refugees face while living in the Meheba refugee camp. One major challenge faced is hardship among single refugee mothers. These are widows, divorcees and unmarried women who are leading, and taking care of their families. They are not employed and do not have enough capital to start or run businesses that can help them generate ample income. They mainly depend on their subsistence farming produce for survival and frequently run into debts or get loans to fundraise for smaller businesses they may be intending to do. Their lifestyle has led to the following negative effects outlined below:

Inadequate housing,

Hunger,

Underdeveloped communities

Cannot provide a balanced diet in their households which can lead to malnutrition and malnutrition diseases in their children such as Kwashiorkor.

Refugee students graduate from senior secondary schools with outstanding results, yet they can hardly further their education since their parents lack funds to support them in tertiary education.

They are usually unemployed because of not having the green National registration card (NRC) which is one of the most important qualifications to be eligible for most employment opportunities or government subsidy in Zambia. This is because citizenship is denied to individuals with refugee status (Bakewell 2007, 13) and the 12 January 2006 draft constitution indicates that this will remain unchanged (Zambia 12 Jan. 2006, Part 5 Art. 20.3). Consequently, this leaves many refugees youths idle in the refugee camp, thus girls fall prey to teenage pregnancies and early marriages while boys lead a thuggery lifestyle which resort to alcohol and drug abuse.

The UNHCR and various NGOs that protect people forced to flee their homes and stateless persons have always come to the aid of these refugee migrants. However, there are still limitations in their help. For this reason, everyone of us is needed to come on board and join hands to help in every way possible to create a better world for all refugees across the globe, and especially for the single refugee mothers for they oversee raising children, who are the future leaders. UNHCR have occasionally provided support to the named victims, however, there are still loopholes to be covered among these families led by ultra-poor single refugee mothers. This is the reason the Single refugee empowerment Innovation (SIREMEI) was established.

SIREMEI ESTABLISHMENT

On 5th November 2022, the Single Refugee Mothers Empowerment Innovation (SEREMEI) was formed by Pascal Milambo Muzungu, a refugee student who was selected and sponsored by Pestalozzi World Zambia, from grade five, primary school in the year 2012 to secondary school at the Pestalozzi education centre where he graduated with 1st distinction, (GCE O' Level, 7 points). He went on to acquire a Mastercard scholarship in 2022 to pursue a degree program in Business administration (Logistics and supply chain management / Business information technology) at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) in Ghana. During his first long vacation break, he worked with Mr. Victor Kamona, a rural development specialist working with Association for Aid and Relief, Japan (AAR Japan) within the camp, helped him to officially launch the SIREMEI innovation on 03rd January 2023. SIREMEI Innovation is a developmental initiative that aimed at providing funds and capital to ultra-poor single refugee mothers to enable them to start a business of their choice. The business will then enable them to make profits which they can use to cater for their daily basic needs with ease. This is a durable solution as it is well structured and provides for both sustainability and scalability. The program came up because of the observation and research he did on the daily life struggles that the refugee mothers face as well as his passion for finding a durable solution to the different challenges faced by refugees in the camp where he was raised.

IMPLEMENTATION, SUSTAINABILITY AND SCALABILITY

Firstly, we met the deputy refugee officer to request for permission to carry the project, furthermore we visited the village head man for approval to work with the refugee mothers in his territory. After all permission



were all secured, we selected 8 ultra-poor, single refugee mothers who are all Angolan nationals living in the Meheba refugee camp, in Zambia. Secondly, we conducted a survey on the type of families they are taking care of, the number of dependants they each have, the businesses they would prefer to do if they were funded with start-up capital and their respective projected profits. After scrutinizing the survey findings, we were certain of the potential and impact the innovation have.

Therefore, In the first month (January to February), two of the eight mothers were funded with five hundred kwacha (K500) each to enable them to start up a business of their choice. They will use the funds for a period of 30 days and then return it to the committee treasurer for the next couple to get funded. In these ways, sustainability is assured. Moreover, the capital funded is returned with a 10% interest which will be kept in the committee's account until it accumulates enough to be given to another single mother not yet part of the committee, thus scalability. A committee organogram was formed to ensure efficient administration, cooperation, and teamwork among the empowered mothers. The mothers voted for their chairperson, vice chairperson and committee treasurer.

With the limited resources at our disposal, the program is first working with eight (8) ultra-poor, single refugee mothers in the Meheba refugee camp Community. The SIREME Innovation intends to increase the number of mothers empowered and will provide Skills training, leadership seminars and basic literacy programs to the empowered single refugee mothers as an extra effort to improve their lives and that of the entire community at large.

SIREME Innovation envisions a world where all refugees have access to opportunities that enable them to unleash their potential. A world where the ultra-poor, single refugee women can trade, make their own profits, to save enough capital to run their own businesses and utilise it to better their lives.

SIREME Innovation looks forward to being extended to other refugee camps if enough funds are generated.

So far, all the mothers within the committee have worked with the funds, utilized the profits made and returned the empowerment fund, thus passing it on to the next two women within the committee.

OUTCOME

Each mother was able to generate six hundred and fifty kwachas (K650) as profits from the five hundred kwacha they were each funded. Hence one thousand and three hundred kwacha (K1,300) was generated by two women in one month. Henceforth ten thousand and four hundred kwacha was made by 8 mothers in a space of 4 months. Currently, the cycle of the project has restarted.

All the participating women were able to return the funded amount, five hundred kwachas (K500) plus the 10% interest or K50 at the end of their given trade period (30 days).

60% of the participant(women) were able to save close to half their profits in the plan to start their own businesses in future.

There are 5 members in each family on average, meaning this project has directly benefited up to 40 members on average. Following a survey on the type of business each woman preferred to do with the funds to be given, we were convinced that each mother is sure to make an estimated profit of K750 exclusive of the capital fund given and the 10% monthly returns at the end of the project.

At least 50% of the participating mothers are now able to provide their basic needs with much more ease than before the operations of the Empowerment Project.

The innovation has had a positive impact in the lives of the Angolan refugee mothers and their families. Additionally, the SIREME Innovation they can now support their daily needs in their families through their businesses. Their appreciation for this project has encouraged us as we are looking for means to advance the project even further.



The SIREME Innovation.

Meheba Cefugee Camp, Zambia

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