

“Educated, Empowered and Inspired”: Beneficiaries tell stories of transformation of lives with help from ILO-Sida Corridor Economic Empowerment Project



On the 4th of December 2015, representatives from ILO, Sida and Government of Zimbabwe participated in an exciting site visit to the Corridor Economic Empowerment Project (CEEP) site at Chitungwiza, a small town just outside of Harare, Zimbabwe.

Gathered at this site were approximately 75 women, girls and men, including people living with disabilities from four different Savings and Credit Co-operatives (SACCOs) as well as representatives from the Zimbabwean Ministry of Small to Medium Enterprises, the local government together with a local chief, the Small Enterprise

Development Corporation, a local Micro-financing Institution, vice-chairman of the Project Advisory Committee, representatives from ILOAIDS and the CEEP project team.

The visit provided an opportunity to interact with the project beneficiaries and highlighted the effects that the CEEP initiative has had on the beneficiaries' lives as told in the following stories:

1. Lufuno SACCO

The visit included 13 members from Lufuno, a SACCO based in Beitbridge. Beitbridge is some 600km from Harare on the border with South Africa. Lufuno is a union of SACCO's whose members are proudly and positively living with HIV and has a membership of more than four hundred members.

In Beitbridge, the ILO-Sida CEEP Project began working with vulnerable groups in 2011 and the focus for this group is on mitigating the effects of AIDS on their members. Through the economic empowerment approach, members have begun or expanded their survivalist businesses to sustainable enterprises. These activities have ensured higher socio-economic status and improvements in nutrition; health and access to HIV related services have improved. Other wider effects include improved access to housing, education for children, and positive support to its members through the group including adherence to treatment. The group also reports some sex workers who have left the trade are now economically active in a less risky manner.

The local government and municipality have seen the value of this approach and provided further assistance to this group through the donation of premises for a shop as well as a 1km square piece of land. Lufuno has been able to generate profits and access a loan to provide a fence around this area as well as drill a solar powered borehole. This will enable them to begin goat and agricultural



farming.

2. The Chitungwiza women SACCO:

The project started working with the women, people living with disabilities and young girls, in Chitungwiza, in 2013. Chitungwiza is a township with more than one million people and a high HIV prevalence. Many women within the location are vulnerable due to the high levels of unemployment and poverty. This is further exacerbated due to the physical disabilities that the beneficiaries are living with, for example, some of these women were kept out of traditional streams of schooling and are now expected to undertake menial jobs at home, e.g. cleaning. This group is considered more vulnerable as existing community-based HIV prevention initiatives considers them asexual and as such not at risk.

The SACCO began under a tree in 2013, but today boasts a permanent location within a warehouse. After attending the Business management, Gender quality and HIV and AIDS training, the group started a group business, called the Metemba project. The group also operates an informal social protection system in the form of a group savings and lending scheme. Their future plans include expanding into other activities including: beading, sewing, selling Metemba to local supermarkets. They have also submitted a business proposal to receive a loan for their business which aims to improve the quality of the packaging of items and expansion of their reach into local markets.



Again, this group reports that the changes that have occurred as a result of CEEP interventions (training, credit and referrals) have been fundamental and transformative e.g. nutrition, schooling, health access, education access for family members. A highlight of one of these changes is that one of the beneficiaries has bought herself a new car which has been life changing; now, traveling long distances is no longer a challenge.

3. Power Circle group SACCO:

This SACCO began in 2014 and has 15 members. The SACCO operates a monthly savings and lending scheme. They completed their business management, HIV and leadership training in 2014. In addition they received \$3000 and later \$7,000 – each individual received \$500 for their sowing project. The SACCOs located within Chitungwiza have been able to mobilize the local government and the Ministry of SMEs to donate an unused clothing warehouse in which many of the businesses established by the SACCOs and their members are now operating. The sewing machines donated by government to this group have made a huge difference in establishing their clothing business. Under this SACCOs is a peanut butter making project and a mushroom growing initiative.



4. Peanut Butter group SACCO:

This SACCO also began in 2014 working from one a house that had been offered by one of their members. The Sacco operates as part of the Power Circle group and established a monthly savings and lending scheme. In 2014 they participated in business management, HIV and leadership training as well as specialised follow-up training in quality control seeing as they deal in food products. The group is into peanut butter production, mushroom and poultry farming. Some of the members of the Mushroom growing group have side income generating initiatives that they have been able to start as a result of their involvement in the CEEP project. This group sell their products (peanut butter, mushrooms and poultry products) to local shops. However, they are planning on reaching large supermarkets in the city centre. In the meantime they are saving some money for collateral in order to apply for a loan to buy bigger equipment. In their testimonies, they group leader said “we are now educated, empowered and inspired”.

The SACCOS in Chitungwiza have reported positive life changes as fall-outs of their participation in the ILO-Sida project interventions. Some of the changes that have been reported by members of this SACCO include:

- Eating healthy food,
- Sending children to school
- Houses built
- They reach-out to local communities with HIV/AIDS prevention messages.
- They are excited by the project and are looking to expand their membership
- Some of the members have registered with universities to further their own education.

