

REDUCING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE



Through behavioural change

In rural Zambia, girl children often become pregnant, are subsequently forced into marriage and most likely drop out of school. This can happen as early as 13 years of age and marriage is also sometimes seen as a strategy to “beat poverty” by the parents. However, the girls are too young to run a home. They have no prior experience emotionally and physiologically to handle marriage and care for children. The husband is likely unemployed and struggling with alcohol. The Western Cluster Program in Zambia supports strategic and repetitive GBV sensitisation campaigns among communities in Luampa, Limulung and Senanga. They have partnered with local specialists from Government departments, traditional leaders, project committees and volunteers to achieve scale, scope and impact in promoting the rights of children. Reflective dialogue meetings enable a common understanding of the contextual drivers of teenage pregnancy and GBV.

The Program ensures that women and men, boys and girls are represented to examine, validate or dispel perspectives. Subject matter specialists also share legal and policy provisions for protection from GBV with the participants.

One of the mothers reported: "I could not manage to take care of my large family as a single mother. I have eight children. I had to let one of my children get married (she was below the permitted age of marriage). After learning about the legal provisions that protect children from being married off at her age, after the workshop I immediately decided to go and retrieve my daughter from that marriage."

The involvement of girls and boys, women and men in generative dialogue has promoted a sense of collective responsibility amongst stakeholders. Traditional leaders who are said to contribute to teenage pregnancy through a "curriculum" that potentiates early sexual debut, are being openly challenged to make adjustments to their content.

Elizabeth, a traditional initiator whose job is to prepare girls for marriage, said

"GBV is happening in marriages. I will be teaching girls to report GBV to victim support and the hospital. I will teach traditional initiators to teach girls to be reporting abuses in marriages."

Targeted communities are now aware of the laws and policies that provide protection, the reporting channels and where to get survivor support services, including free counselling services ■

