

Zoe Empowers Rwanda Update: June 2024

Skilled to Support Their Families and Respond to Community Needs

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Vocational tool kits distributed in Kigembe region to Zoe Empowers youth entering their second year

Learning a vocational skill can be time consuming and require a bit more money for the youth in the Zoe Empowers program, but the businesses resulting from this targeted training can be very profitable. As such, all youth are offered the opportunity to pursue vocational passions. Most recently, 77 youths from groups started in January 2023 (Kinihira and Kigembe regions) and 36 youths from groups started in July 2022 (Bukure area), received start-up kits after completing their vocational training. This included 71 youths in tailoring, 4 in welding, 7 in carpentry, 3 in knitting, 18 in hair dressing, and 10 in construction.

Local leaders, especially those in charge of youth and job creation, were invited to participate in the distribution of the start-up kits. This collaboration provides connections so that the youth will be informed of available opportunities for government grants or loans given through financial institutions and future capacity building trainings. Also at this occasion, graduated youths who have already created successful businesses shared their success stories to encourage their fellow Zoe peers.

Another important form of vocational training common in the Zoe Empowers programs concerns learning a specific skill like soapmaking, tie-dying, or basket weaving. The latter has been especially lucrative and beneficial in Rwanda where plastic bags have been banned and there is the desire to mitigate environmental pollution from discarded paper bags.

Making woven shopping bags is quick to learn and becomes an income project that is easy to start and manage. Because making these bags can be done along with other businesses or during free time, it can serve both to generate income and as a form of recreation. The youth learn that there is no time to lose

and it opens their sense of cooperation, commitment, and creativity. In addition, it fulfills the community's needs to have shopping bags which are durable and long-lasting compared to the single use bags commonly available.

Zoe paid all the training costs and provided interested youth with initial grants to buy materials. The youth in turn are willing to pass on this handcraft skill to others both within Zoe groups and in the community at large.



Shopping bag weaving by youths from Bukure 2022-C2 groups

GENERAL PROGRAM UPDATES

Agricultural Update



Storage of the maize harvested by the Umucyo Kigembe Group which began meeting January 2023.

Most Zoe groups have shared agricultural projects for additional income, and households plant various crops for their family's consumption and income. Zoe makes success possible through agricultural skills training and by supporting groups with inputs that they cannot afford during their first two years such as seeds, fertilizers, pesticides, farming implements, land rent, and technical advice as needed.

Through collaboration with local leaders, such as sector agriculture specialist, Zoe youth are taught on new farming techniques which can help them to get more produce to satisfy market demand and home consumption. This includes information on how to maximize the small land that they have as well as the advantages of planting certified seeds, adhering to proper planting schedules, using chemical inputs as needed, and taking measures to prevent soil erosion.

Zoe focuses on skills and knowledge that will help the youth to gain the greatest outcomes possible for the community in which they live. For this most recent period, the harvests were more bountiful than expected.



Specialized training on new farming methods for Bweramana groups recruited July 2023

Cooperative Training

The youth from different groups gathered for a specialized training by the government official in charge of business development and employment at the sector level. They were advised to think deeper on how their businesses can remain profitable and grow even after graduation from the Zoe program. They learned that one way of doing this is by working in cooperatives. By combining business efforts, they can access to government funds, loans, and grants which are designated to support young entrepreneurs. Additionally, through cooperatives youths are viewed as trustworthy and valued in the community. This makes it easier for government and other institutions to recognize them and give them a priority for any economic opportunity.



Members of second year groups from Kabagari region attend training on cooperatives

Education Support and School Reintegration

In addition to focusing on individual empowerment for heads of household, Zoe Empowers prioritizes the education of siblings for their future success. The program works to make sure that all school-aged children attend school, especially helping reintegrate those who have dropped out. To encourage their education, Zoe provides school materials to the students during their first year in the program.



Notebook and pen distribution to the students of Bweramana groups which were recruited July 2023.

Livestock Distribution

Before joining the Zoe empowerment program, the majority of the youth-led families did not have livestock. This not only meant they had a lower level of wealth or a source of protein, but they also did not have manure for increasing their agricultural production. So, after training on food security and animal husbandry all families are provided with one animal to start their livestock projects. A veterinarian at sector level taught the youth about animal husbandry and then provided vaccinations for the pigs and goats that were being distributed



Livestock distribution to the heads of household in Bweramana groups