

Zoe Empowers Rwanda Update: December 2020

Covid-19 Cannot Stop the Empowerment of Determined Youth!



Even though restrictions implemented to stop transmission of Covid-19 have had a negative economic effect for the entire economy of Rwanda, it has not halted the progress of the Zoe youth - even those in their first year.

Members of the January 2020 class of Zoe groups were only a couple months into the program when they had to make adjustments to how they organized their groups and received training. By forming pods of five families, the youth could still meet and organize group projects and mutual help activities. Through these small groups, they received both their initial grants and the extra Covid-19 grants provided by Zoe. They began various income projects and have managed to not only sustain themselves but also accumulate savings which have grown to match 100% of their initial capital.

Zoe also provided additional Covid-19 grants to second year participants and those who had special needs. Participants received between \$20 and \$40, depending on the size of their business. These grants were distributed in two installments. Prior to the grant provision, Zoe staff together with the youth group leaders evaluated how the businesses were doing to determine appropriate distributions of grants.

- 10% of the youth's businesses closed completely; the extra grants enabled them to re-start or create new businesses
- 35% were still running their initial businesses but had losses during the Covid-19 lockdown; the grants helped them purchase additional stock and adjust to Covid-19 restrictions
- 55% had accumulated a small amount of savings they used along with the grants to re-open their businesses

Some youth used their savings to create pod group projects which provide income. In general, all families have been able to meet daily needs, and invest in different projects such as land, livestock, and other assets.

Gilbert who was just starting his third year with the Amizero Rugerero Group received an extra-grant and reopened his barber shop: *“With the Covid-19 situation, my business was closed completely. I used all my savings and the capital to survive during the Covid-19 lockdown. I had no hope that I would find more capital to reopen my project. Fortunately, with Zoe support I received another grant and I reopened my barbershop. Now I am living a suitable life.”*



Youth from five third year empowerment groups - Amizero, Ikerekezo, Ubumwe, Impano, and Imena - formed a cooperative of carpenters. Now the community can find locally-made furniture whenever needed.

Innocent from Urumuri Group had to close his livestock trading business because it involved traveling between farms and markets to buy and sell. During the Covid-19 lockdown he started to raise livestock at home. He reopened his business thanks to Zoe's support together with his savings.



GENERAL PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

Vocational Training

Even while observing Covid-19 protocols for avoiding transmission of the virus, youth were able to complete vocational training in their areas of interest and then receive the start-up kits necessary to begin their trade businesses. Below, the youth receive resources from Zoe for tailoring, knitting, and welding businesses.



Mutual Help Projects Continue

Zoe youth have continued to help each other and vulnerable people in their community through mutual help activities. These include house construction and repair, toilet construction, kitchen garden planting, and crop cultivation. During this reporting period, various groups were able to build homes for families that lacked shelter. Having a safe and stable home is crucial to becoming self-sufficient.



Left, Zoe youth from Ejoheza Rubaya Group (started July 2019) worked together to build a house for a group member. Right are youth from groups started January 2018 picking up construction supplies Zoe provided for house construction (cement, windows, and doors).

Community Outreach

During the period of May-November, 2020, Zoe youth worked with other volunteers to help community members learn about and follow restrictive measures in public places such as markets, shops, hospitals and other places due to Covid-19. Dressed in reflective jackets, the youth have spent time in their community talking to people and giving them information about measures for fighting the spread of coronavirus.



August and Floride from the 2019 Umucyo/Rubaya Group explain Covid-19 prevention measures to community members

Government Support

Due to the positive reputation of the Zoe program, the Rwanda government often partners with Zoe groups and provides assistance. For example, with government support and the contributions of their own savings, the children of the third year Ingenzi Musha Group were able to begin a poultry project. The group successfully applied for a government grant which they used to purchase their first lot of chickens. They used their own resources to build a hutch. They keep chicks for a period of one month then re-sell them. After the first profits were realized, they were able to continue this project on their own. Everyone in the group receives a monthly wage from this project.



Livestock and Farming Projects

Zoe provides initial resources for crop production and keeping livestock and then the youth maintain and increase these projects both as individual and group activities. During this reporting period, the Zoe families planted various types of food and cash crops. The harvest was enough to provide food security for the families with surplus to sell at markets. (In the pictures below, the date following the group name indicates when they entered into the Zoe program. C1 indicates class 1 groups which started in January, C2 groups started in July.)

Twitezimbere Group
(2020-C1) breed and sell
hens



Youth from Ikirezi Rubaya
Group (2019-C2) received
sheep

Umuryango-Inshuti-
Twuzuzanye (2018-C1)
harvested banana





Above: Paulin from Duterimbere Kayenzi Group (2018-C2) has a project of growing mushrooms



Above right: Duterimbere Kinazi Group (2019-C1) harvested cassava, to be dried and processed.



Above: Umuryango Musha Group (2018-C1) harvested tomatoes



Left: Ubumwe, Urumuri, and Tuzamurane Groups of the Kibirizi area (2020-C1) harvested carrots and beetroots

Below: A sub-group from Tuzamurane Rubaya (2019-C2) created a business of sorghum selling



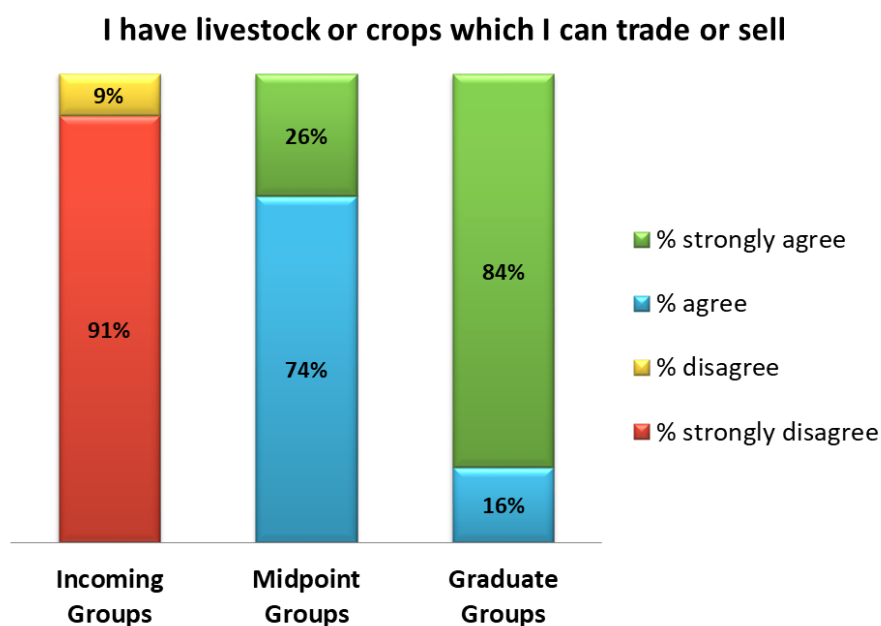
PROGRAM DATA HIGHLIGHTS

By Kristin Magee, Program Data Manager

When strict regulations were put in place in Rwanda due to Covid-19, the lockdown caused almost all businesses to temporarily close. Even after some of those restrictions were lifted in the weeks and months that followed, some projects could no longer operate within the new protective measures. Fortunately, Zoe empowerment group members are very resourceful. They quickly identified other projects that were viable and got started, helped in some cases by funds sent by Zoe supporters in the US.

Agricultural activities such as growing crops and raising livestock were among the options for the reallocation of their resources. Because of the emphasis that Zoe places on diversification, nearly all the group members in Rwanda were already involved in these ventures, even if they had other businesses. Increasing their crop production and keeping more livestock helped the families to weather the pandemic by giving each family more food for their own use or to sell or share with others.

The Zoe empowerment program survey was conducted before the pandemic, but the question below illustrates how quickly the families increase their assets through farming. The data shown below is from surveys conducted in 2019 from 272 incoming families, as they entered the empowerment program; 188 families at their midpoint (one and a half years into the program) ; and 181 graduates, at the end of their third year.



The survey data shows when they entered the program, none of those surveyed had any agricultural assets. However, all households surveyed at their midpoint or later had more livestock or crops than they needed for their own family's consumption.

The newest groups in Rwanda started in January 2020. Although the families at that time were under similar conditions to the incoming groups in the chart above, livestock and agricultural inputs for crops are some of the first resources that were distributed by Zoe. The support they were given by their program facilitators, mentors, and groupmates has allowed even these vulnerable families to continue to make progress, despite the setbacks of the Covid-19 pandemic.