

Thought Piece: Economic Empowerment

How many of us take for granted that we have the freedom and ability to obtain and control our own economic resources? We can apply for the jobs we want, operate our own bank accounts and spend our money on what we choose. Mothers' Union know, through our work with communities across the world and the experiences our 4 million members, that this is simply not the reality for so many women.

Women's Rights Limited

Too often we see countries operating where women rights are limited - they can't own land and property, there are no enforced policies of equal pay and there are complete failures to tackle discrimination and harassment in the work place. All these form barriers to economic empowerment.

The reality is that these cases of harassment and other forms of gender-based violence have an impact on women's ability to generate and sustain income. A woman may have her independence curtailed by a husband or partner preventing her from working or be devastated by building up debts in her name. Sexual and physical assault may also have an impact on employment and income generating ability. And this has to change.

A Step Change

Mothers' Union have long worked within communities to create a step change against these barriers. In 2012 I travelled to Nairobi and there I met a couple who proudly showed me the impact that our Church and Community Mobilisation programme was having on their lives. Mothers' Union had facilitated their community to recognise their capacity and potential and to work with others to respond to shared challenges and needs. Through this process the couple had started their own kitchen garden which then led to them farming the steep land around their property and raise small livestock. They had therefore become economically empowered, able to grow their assets and sustain their own income.

A key part of their journey was working in partnership as a couple, something that is a focus of our community based programmes. The husband and wife having an equal stake not only created a source of income for their family but their communication and relationship improved thus strengthening the life of their family.

As expressed expertly in Micah 6v8; *"What does the Lord require of you? To act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with your God"*. We see first hand that by empowering women it benefits not just them, but also their children, families

and communities. And it is a group of thriving families that can add up to make thriving communities.

UNCSW Delegation

It is this inclusive and mutual approach that makes the work of Mothers' Union stand out against others and helps create long lasting transformation in areas throughout the world. However, we also know that we have a responsibility to seek out justice through lobbying governments to "do the right thing". At the UNCSW this year, our delegation will be calling on these governments to tackle the current injustices of women's economic empowerment. We want to ensure that women have equal rights and access to economic assets, such as land, social protection, pensions and employment. We will also be lobbying for policies that tackle workplace sexual discrimination and harassment.

Our combined approach of working with communities on the ground whilst lobbying government's at the highest level allows us to actively seek our vision of a world where God's love is shown through loving, respectful, and flourishing relationships and stable family life.