



NEWS BULLETIN 330
THURSDAY AUGUST 22, 2019

Girl Ambassadors Challenge Child Marriage in Zimbabwe



Superstar: Trish serves as WAP's ambassador in Epworth community and is much admired by other girls.

A leading advocate for the rights of women and girls in Zimbabwe is finding that empowering girls can be a powerful tool in the fight against early marriage.

A recent survey of 62 girls in Harare by the Women Advocacy Project (WAP) found that over a third might have married if it had not been for the influence of girl "ambassadors" who have been trained by WAP to work with vulnerable girls.

Child marriage has reached critical levels in Zimbabwe, where one in three girls marries before the age of 18 - the minimum legal age. This can lead to higher risk of sexually transmitted diseases, sexual and domestic violence, and an abrupt end to education.

A needs assessment by WAP of 136 girls in August 2018 identified four root causes: poverty, harmful cultural practices, peer pressure and a lack of understanding about sexual and reproductive health.

In October 2018, WAP recruited five girls to serve as ambassadors and organize clubs where vulnerable girls could learn about reproductive health (top photo). WAP drew on material from [Girls Not Brides](#) and received funding from the [Rockflower Foundation](#). Alex Kotowski, an AP Peace Fellow, provided technical support.

This year's Peace Fellow, [McLane Harrington](#), from the Fletcher School at Tufts University, followed up recently by conducting an informal survey of 62 girls and found that not one had married in the previous nine months. Twenty-five girls said that they might well have married had it not been for the clubs and ambassadors.

"Before I met Trish I faced many problems, but now Trish is counseling me so I will not get married," said Emily, referring to her ambassador from the community of Epworth (photo).



Constance Mugari, founder of WAP, buys menstrual pads for the girls' clubs.

[Writing in a blog](#), McLane described the results as "uplifting and positive news for an organization which is working to keep girls empowered, educated and out of marriage."

Encouraged by the success of the clubs, Constance Mugari, the founder of WAP, plans to train girls to make and sell soap with the hope of giving them an economic incentive to remain in school and avoid marriage. Inflation in Zimbabwe reached 175% in June.

McLane is helping WAP to raise \$4,500, which would enable 35 girls to produce and sell 640 bottles of liquid soap in six months. Profits will be shared between the girls and re-invested by WAP.

WAP also hopes that the soap project will build teamwork and confidence among the ambassadors and their trainees.

McLane has raised over \$1,300 for the soap startup. [Click to donate.](#)

***The Advocacy Project, 2201 P St, NW, Rm 204, Washington, DC 20037.
+ 1 202 758 3328; DCOffice@advocacynet.org***