

## *A Project at a Glance*

# Girls Read: A Method to Reduce HIV/AIDS Rates in Zambia

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Before joining the Glocal Program, I was fortunate to work as the district project coordinator in a project called Girls Read in Ndola, Zambia.

This project, conducted by the Forum for African Women Educationalists of Zambia (FAWEZA) in partnership with Population Council and World Reader (with funding support from the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR)/USAID's DREAMS (Determined, Resilient, Empowered, AIDS-free, Mentored, and Safe) project) included a two-year program that was implemented in 36 schools in the three districts of Chingola, Ndola, and Lusaka. The project, which targeted a total of 1,152 adolescent girls aged 12 to 19, aimed to decrease the phenomenon of girls prematurely leaving school, a phenomenon with many harmful consequences and strong links to HIV/AIDS.

Focused in selected schools with high percentages of overaged girls, both in rural and peri-urban environments, the project had three key components: after class safe spaces, parent engagement meetings, and e-reading. The project also involved two mentors per school that mentored the girls on a regular basis, taught on topics relating to public health, and conducted fun learning activities using the e-readers (Amazon Kindles) provided to them. As a result, the girls have stronger contact with the institution and its staff and thus tend to remain in school.

This project was a part of the DREAMS initiative, which is an ambitious \$385 million USAID effort to reduce HIV prevalence among adolescent girls and young women in HIV priority areas.

As a component of this initiative, the two-year DREAMS Innovation Challenge was meant in part to address this issue of girls prematurely leaving school.

Although I had been already working with FAWEZA before the project started, I was eager to join this specific project because of its unique approach. My role was critical because besides conducting all activities and ensuring mentors delivered the curriculum to the girls, I was key in ensuring cooperation and collaboration between the different stakeholders, including the government, school managers, donors, implementing partners, parents, and, most importantly, the participating girls themselves.

I was privileged to see the first year of the project conclude with the first group of girls successfully graduating after 19 sessions. The greatest joy was to see girls graduate from the program more empowered with skills and knowledge on HIV/AIDS prevention, pregnancy, goal setting, effective communication, and assertiveness. Additionally, it was empowering to see how the parents and teachers appreciated the project and were inspired to create similar initiatives that encourage girls' schooling in their communities.

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**Thukiwe Namfukwe is in her 1st year at Glocal. Prior to joining the program, she worked as the district project coordinator of the Girl Read project in Zambia.**