



ZOE

Empowerment beyond charity.

Ubuntu “Grace” Ndora Empowerment Group, Rwanda *Graduation!!*



The graduation ceremony for the Ubuntu Empowerment Group was a joyous celebration of the amazing accomplishments of the young family leaders and their siblings. Their special day was filled with prayer, speeches, testimonies, thanksgiving, and much dancing. Community leaders were present to provide words of encouragement and receive gifts from the graduates.

It is a tradition for ZOE Rwanda groups to make a donation to members of the community who are poor and vulnerable. However, they usually do not give food or clothes because they believe this lowers dignity and is not appropriate. Instead, the gift is likely to be livestock, seeds, or a grant of money. It is powerful to see these once vulnerable children not only thriving but now bringing hope and opportunity to others in their community!

All members who began with the group in 2015 were still active at the time of graduation. This is a testament to how the children helped each other face the difficult task of overcoming their many challenges. It was their goal that no one should be left behind. The information below is a summary the accomplishments of your group that resulted from the financial, prayerful, and moral support you provided. First, a message from your group.

Dear Parents:

We would like to thank you for your love and kindness. You took us from the streets, homeless, and extreme poverty. Dear parents you taught us how to work hard so that we can help our families and community as well. From the time we found you, we became as other community members and we are no longer discriminated and isolated.

We ask God to bless you and we assure you that we will not return to the same situation where you took us from before.

Your Children from UBUNTU Group

How Your Partnership Changed Lives Forever

Group Activities: The group has two projects where they gather together and work together for increasing their family economic status and social well-being.

1. Merry-go-round fund: With this group activity, when members gather together they collect some little amount which is taken as group saving. After an agreed amount of time they decide whom to give the money. They make round of all group members (households). With the merry-go-round fund project the youth buy animals, invest in business, and help their siblings with school fees and materials. Most of the time this amount helps them to top up their businesses capital or they can pay medical insurance for their families.

2. Mutual help project: A mutual help activity is done every week. The children select which household needs help in terms of kitchen garden planting, home and surroundings cleaning, food growing or house repair/construction. This activity helps the children to be bound in terms of social life as well as providing economic strengthening and food security.

Individual Income Activities and Businesses: Typically, the heads of households begin simple businesses in their first year with their ZOE grant and then enlarge that business or begin additional businesses as they progress through the three year empowerment program. Younger siblings are often supported or trained by the older sibling (or sometimes directly by the group) to start businesses of their own. With business profits, 90% of the families started saving their money in community group funds and the local bank (SACCO).

These are the businesses started which have been profitable for the group members:

[Note: OVC stands for orphans and vulnerable children]

- Food crops growing and selling -----= 7 OVC
- Sorghum juice selling -----= 2 OVC
- Vegetables selling -----=10 OVC
- Fruits selling -----= 14 OVC
- Firewood selling -----= 2 OVC
- Charcoal selling -----= 2 OVC
- Motorbike taxi service -----= 1 OVC

Some members attended vocational training and then received start-up grants to begin the following:

- Tailoring (sewing machines) = 9 OVC
- Masonry (bubble level, hammers, square and other masonry tools) = 1 OVC



Food Security and Agriculture: All families were provided vegetable seeds for their kitchen gardens, seeds for planting a crop (like corn), papaya trees, and one pig. Before ZOE, the children usually only ate three meals a week, after graduation they are able to find three meals each day, and they eat balanced meals. They are also selling their surplus produce/crops and livestock for extra money.

Health and Hygiene: During the first year in the program, ZOE assisted families with medical insurance. By second and third years in the program, all 100% families could access medical insurance thanks to their businesses and through the group merry-go-round fund. Nineteen of the families built new latrines.

Housing: The group members provided assistance and ZOE provided windows, doors, iron sheets, nails and paid constructors so that four families could build homes.

Education: ZOE supported 15 youth with school fees and materials for their reintegration into school. The younger siblings are attending school regularly now that they can afford basic materials, are well-fed, and healthy.

Faith: Before ZOE, the children felt abandoned and angry with God. They never attended church programs. It was hard to explain to them how God works and how amazing His love is. With ZOE program witness and spiritual activities, such as bible verse devotions and prayer, the children began to learn how God has been so amazing to them. They started attending church and invite their friends to church programs.

Special Accomplishments: Ubuntu Group donated 12 goats to 12 poor families in their community.

What Happens Next: Graduation marks an important milestone for the group, but it is by no means the end of the project. ZOE Rwanda groups have forged such strong bonds during their three years in the program that they remain committed to each other and, with rare exception, continue their regular weekly meetings. Additionally, they have come to see themselves as the agents of change in their own lives and their community. Instead of resources from ZOE, they now have their own ingenuity and each other.

ZOE does keep in contact with graduated members and has observed that the graduates continue to:

- Protect each other from mistreatment and provide a safety net in times of hardship.
- Reach out to others, teaching what they have learned and helping empower the poor and vulnerable.
- Grow businesses and employ others, with an emphasis on hiring orphans and widows.
- Adopt other children into their families.

Your partnership has been a manifestation of God's love for the children. With your support they transformed their lives, discovered hope, and learned of God's love for them. Now they are not only prepared to take care of themselves and their siblings, they are caring for those around them as a way of sharing the blessings they have received. Your commitment may have been limited to three years for a specific group of children, but its effects will last a lifetime and ripple forward to many, many others in need.