



Forced by Circumstances to Come Together

Kahala Cannon
Executive, Africa Office

“Coming together is a beginning, staying together is progress, and working together is success.” - Henry Ford

Thanksgiving is a time when many people in the United States come together to celebrate and reflect on the things, circumstances, and people in our lives that we are most grateful for. In this period of reflection, people from different walks of life also gather to share their time, talents, and resources to serve and be a blessing to each other.

Oftentimes, seasons or circumstances bring people together for a common goal. I am a champion of collaborative work, which gives us a chance to work toward achieving a positive result together. Because of this, I am fondly reminded of two dynamic women who I met during my recent visit to Luvinjelweni, Maguga, in the Hhohho region of Eswatini (formerly known as Swaziland). These two women, Mrs. Lomthantazo Dlamini and Mrs. Bethusile Gumedze, described themselves as two “ordinary members” of the community. They joined together to lead a community in a life-transforming, income-generating economic empowerment project.

The culture of Eswatini is patriarchal: gender inequality at times widely prevails and women can be considered second-class citizens. In the Luvinjelweni area, the traditional structure, or patriarchal head, determines how the land is used and directly benefits from the use of the land. Women are excluded from the decision-making process, have minimal land rights, and have little means of self-sustainability. In addition, the area is still reeling from the economic impact of the global pandemic and the rise in the cost of commodities due to the war in Ukraine. Because of the economic disparities, women are disproportionately affected. Both Mrs. Dlamini and Mrs. Gumedze explained that it was not



difficult to bring the group of twenty-two people from various families together for the project, because “They were forced by circumstances to come together.”

The patriarchal leaders gave the group the land for their income-generating project. The two women led the group, which was comprised of mothers and their children, and a few men, towards economic sustainability and independence. They planted pawpaw (papaya) trees, potatoes, and maize, which yielded an abundant harvest. The project benefitted the entire community by providing food security for the families, a means to generate income through the sale of produce to grocery stores and individuals within the community, and funds to reinvest back into the project to grow their business revenue.

Currently, women like Mrs. Dlamini and Mrs. Gumedze are empowering more women to become economically independent, which in turn enables them to advocate for their rights and claim leadership positions within society. In the words of Maya Angelou, “You may not control all the events that happen to you, but you can decide not to be reduced by them.”

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kahala Cannon is the Area Executive for Africa, Division of Overseas Ministries /Global Ministries.

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