

# Women's Economic Empowerment In Africa



*Water situation before boreholes.*

With partnerships in Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Zimbabwe and Zambia, Microfinancing Partners in Africa (MPA) empowers those living in extreme poverty to lift themselves up with dignity through services and education. Its Women's Economic Empowerment Project provides women-led organizations with boreholes, which supply clean drinking water and water for agricultural projects, helping to address the root causes of poverty, including exclusion from crop production. The project's beneficiaries are also in existing women-led micro-lending groups, which provide microfinancing loans for agricultural income-generating projects.

Providing boreholes in areas where women have received financial support for agricultural projects creates a ripple effect. Statistics collected by MPA show that a woman who receives a small loan to launch an agribusiness is more likely to succeed if she has reliable access to water, saving her hours every day that would have been lost walking for water. Collecting water, often from unsafe sources, is a daily burden that falls disproportionately on women, who spend one-to-two hours per day walking up to five miles for water.



*Cabbage ready for market.*

As women's incomes are lifted, so are their prospects of breaking the cycle of poverty. Their families are healthier when they are able to eat more than one meal a day and avoid contaminated drinking supplies.

Women in this group were also able to pay for their children's education and repay the loan. Once repaid, the money was recycled to finance the next woman's enterprise.

The project has been implemented in rural villages in Bukoba, Tanzania, and Masaka, Uganda. In these areas, it is reported that more than 60% of the population lives in poverty on less than \$1.90 a day, with 75% of the population relying on subsistence farming. Preventable deaths from water-related illnesses, such as diarrhea and cholera, persist. In these communities, women have been historically excluded from the means of production, owing to patriarchy. Even now, they face significant barriers to economic development, including the lack of access to credit.



*Water tanks connected to irrigation pipes.*

We are called to uphold the dignity of each person and to walk in solidarity with marginalized communities. This project addresses two root deprivations: water and opportunity. It affirms the water situation before the boreholes.

It affirms the worthiness of women's access to fundamental resources for health and self-sufficiency. Community members are empowered to lift themselves out of poverty with dignity, by giving them a hand up and not a hand down.

*This article was first published in Mercy Now, the newsletter of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, as part of a series about Mercy Fund for Ministry grant recipients and how their funded work lives out Mercy's Critical Concerns and Works of Mercy. This ministry empowers the economic livelihood and health of women by providing clean, safe water and meeting people where they are in a spirit of community. For more information on the work of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, please visit their website at <https://sistersofmercy.org/about-us/>.*

