

...World Day of Prayer – Women supporting women in Zimbabwe

Rev. Andrea Wöllenstein, EMS Women's Advisory Board and Chairperson of the Christian Education Fund of the Evangelical Church of Kurhessen-Waldeck.

"Rise! Take Your Mat and Walk!" that is what the women from Zimbabwe called out to us at the World Day of Prayer in March 2020. Rising, getting on your feet and taking one's life into one's hands. Rise, get out of your comfort zone and stand up for justice - this is what the WDP service and the solidarity in prayer around the globe encouraged us to do!

It was the last big event for us in Germany before the lockdown due to the Corona pandemic started. Rise, yes - but stay at home. Pray - but in the quiet closet. What we experience as a massive intervention in our lives is a catastrophe for people in the poor countries of the world.

"The situation has made the country unlivable. We just don't know what to do", wrote Dr Emmie Wade from Harare before Easter. "For 21 days, all public life is to be locked down. The borders are closed, as well as all schools, restaurants, offices and recreation areas. People are to be kept off the streets. There is a threat of famine, because Zimbabwe lives from people buying or selling their products at the market or on the streets. They cannot afford to stay at home. Not even for one day."

Emmie Wade heads the "Kunzwana Women's Association" (<http://www.kunzwana.co.zw/>), a non-governmental organisation that works with women in rural areas. I met her in 1998, on the fringes of the World Council of Churches Assembly in Harare. We have been in touch since then. Kunzwana has built a broad network among women in rural areas. 6.560 women are members and can attend courses in more than 22 different areas. From chicken farming to health care, basket weaving, sewing, vegetable growing, soap and sanitary towel production and much more. Through the "Ausbildungshilfe/ Christian Education Fund" (www.ausbildungshilfe.de), the small relief organization of our regional church, we support Kunzwana in the education and promotion of young girls, many of whom are AIDS orphans.

"Give us compassion and the willingness to help those who are suffering", we prayed at the World Day of Prayer. Thus, I wrote a letter to the World Day of Prayer women in my region with the title: "Easter eggs for Zimbabwe" and asked for donations. The response was overwhelming: To date, over 13.000 Euros were received on our donations account of the "Christian Education Fund"!



Seamstress

Already before Easter, we transferred a first amount. From this the women bought fabrics for masks, which they gave away to needy people or sold to others to have an income. We transfer the money to an account in England. This ensures that the horrendous fees are not deducted, which are currently common in Zimbabwe.



Headdress matching the mask

Further funds are intended for the construction of water cisterns for watering the gardens and for school meals. Even before Corona lockdown, the effects of food shortages due to the drought were clearly felt. Now more than 500 children come every day for a warm meal. "People here are not afraid of Corona," writes Emmie Wade, "they're hungry!"

The ideas for "fundraising activities" of our WDP women were manifold: Young girls made music on the market place. Women sewed masks and gave them away in exchange for a donation to Zimbabwe. Others forwarded my appeal for donations, so that the circle of supporters has become wider. When many people participate, even the smallest amounts help. Therefore, it is true that this difficult time not only separates us from each other, but also strengthens cohesion and solidarity.



School premises



School children receive urgently needed meals

...as a social worker – against precarious life conditions

Rev. Andrea Wöllenstein represents the Women's work of the Evangelical Church of Kurhessen-Waldeck at EMS Women's Advisory Board



Emma Mahlunge

Emma Mahlunge was born in Rhodesia in 1937 and grew up in a family of agricultural workers. Her mother died when she was three years old. Her father, who worked as a gardener for white missionaries in Apartheid Rhodesia, encouraged and supported his six daughters to go to school.

After her marriage, she was not allowed to continue working. Those were the laws. Convinced that women must be able to take care of themselves, she opened her home to women's groups and trained them in a variety

of skills. By 1965 her work had become so well-known that various companies wanted to sell their products on the African market.

After independence in 1980, she further qualified with a degree and diploma in social work. As a social worker she then became acquainted with the catastrophic living conditions of women on commercial farms. Without school and professional training, they were completely subordinated to their husbands. Many suffered from gender-specific violence and unjust inheritance laws.

Emma Mahlunge has made the situation of these women public and the legislators aware of the unjust conditions. As a result, the legal discrimination against women was gradually abolished.

A new challenge was posed by the government's land reform, which expropriated the white owners of the commercial farms. Many of them left the country. More than two million farm workers became unemployed. With their families, they were driven from their homes and did not know where to go.

Emma Mahlunge used her pension salary to set up a training center where the destitute and homeless women of former farm workers found shelter until they could move to nearby villages. She registered this centre as the "Kunzwana Women's Association".

There, women are still taught practical skills such as making clothes, knitting, sewing, weaving, farming, carpentry, small animal husbandry, making soap, peanut butter and other food products.

In order to further expand the center, she established contacts with other women's organizations in the country and worldwide. Today the Kunzwana Women's Association is one of the most important non-governmental organizations in Zimbabwe with 7.650 members from 215 villages. Her daughter, Dr. Emmie Wade, has now taken over the leadership and continues her mother's work.

In March 2018, Emma Mahlunge was awarded the "Human Rights Award" for her life's work.



Co-workers at Kunzwana Women's Association