

## Working with women to transform lives

By Alison Preston and Leigh Arnold

**MARCH 8** marks the 100th anniversary of International Women's Day. It's a day to celebrate a century of progress for women's rights.

Much has been achieved since 1911. Millions of women across the world have won the right to vote and have gained reproductive rights over their own bodies. In the developed world, women have surpassed men at many levels of the education system.

But much remains to be done. Women are still not paid equally to men. They are still underrepresented in senior positions in business and politics. And globally women have poorer access to education and health care and suffer more violence than men.

### The challenge

The challenges to women's empowerment are numerous. According to the United Nations office for Women, over 70% of the world's poor are women and girls.

To overcome that level of disadvantage Anglicord and its partners rely on dynamic, resilient women who work hard to improve the lives of all people in their community.

### Kenya: celebrating a better life

Charity Waruguru Ndegwa is a Kenyan farmer who has faced more than her fair share of hardship. At 60 years of age she is carer and provider for five young grandchildren – a legacy of HIV and AIDS borne by so many grandmothers across Africa.

Yet the burdens of Charity's life are lighter today, thanks to support from Anglicord's partner in Mt Kenya West Diocese, the Mother's Union.

"I now can feed my grandchildren and pay for their education – these have been such great worries for me until now," Charity says.

Charity joined an MU support group for people affected by HIV and AIDS. Following training in community development and small business skills, Charity has significantly improved her income from farming.

"Before I joined the group I had two chickens, Charity says. "Now I have six sheep and more than ten chickens, which not only provide food for the household but also can be sold when school fees for my grandchildren are due."

"We learned about a 'strength-based approach' and it has helped me to realise the potential I have and the resources that are right in front of me to improve my life."

Jay Maheswaran, Anglicord's Development Program Manager, trained Mother's Union staff in Mt Kenya West over the past year in the strength-based approach.

The approach draws on local people's strengths, ideas and vision and is driven by the local partners and communities, rather than by outside 'experts'.

"It is very encouraging to see the training already bearing fruit in people's lives," Dr Maheswaran says. "For a grandmother to have peace of mind that she can feed and educate the children in her care by recognising her own skills and resources is very significant."

### South Africa: protecting young women

Simply growing up is a high risk venture for young girls in the Eastern Cape of South Africa – the country's poorest province.

Anglicord's partner, the Anglican Department of Social Responsibility (DSR) in the Diocese of Grahamstown, is

proactively working with school girls to equip them to respond to the risks they face in their community.

"Through our work with groups of school girls, we are building self-esteem and independence," says Judy Silwana, a community development worker with DSR.

"We are also providing very practical training in avoiding rape, responding to a violent or sexual attack, and the steps involved in reporting rape to police."

Unfortunately, cultural and traditional practices in the Eastern Cape continue to place women and girls at particular risk of HIV infection and violence. Up to 30% of the population is HIV+, and as social networks and family structures are eroded, women and children suffer increased abuse and violence.

DSR recognise that these challenges must be addressed by everyone – not just women.

"Reducing gender-based violence and addressing cultural beliefs that disempower women is something that needs to be dealt with at every level of the community," Judy says.

Anglicord celebrates dynamic, resilient women like Charity and Judy who, through great determination, are transforming lives in their communities.

You can read about the remarkable work of other strong women in the separate story on this page and also on page 6.

### The future

Many challenges remain to improve the lives of women and others living in poor communities.

Shockingly high mortality rates of women during childbirth are a particularly critical issue. Across sub-Saharan Africa around 9 women die for every 1,000 live births.

Over the next five years Anglicord will work to improve maternal and child health in remote, nomadic communities including the Maasai in Kenya and the Afar in Ethiopia.

This work will take place through a new Australian Government program called the Australia Africa Community Engagement Scheme (AACES).

"The AACES program is an exciting, new, AusAID-funded initiative that builds on two decades of Anglicord efforts to strengthen communities from the grass-roots, often starting with women," says Misha Coleman, Anglicord's CEO.

"In saving the lives of mothers and their babies we are helping build a more healthy and prosperous future for whole communities."

With donations from its supporters, Anglicord can continue working to improve women's lives across the developing world so that they can help their communities to overcome poverty.

**To support Anglicord's work with women, please donate online at [www.anglicord.org.au](http://www.anglicord.org.au), by phone on 1 800 249 880.**



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