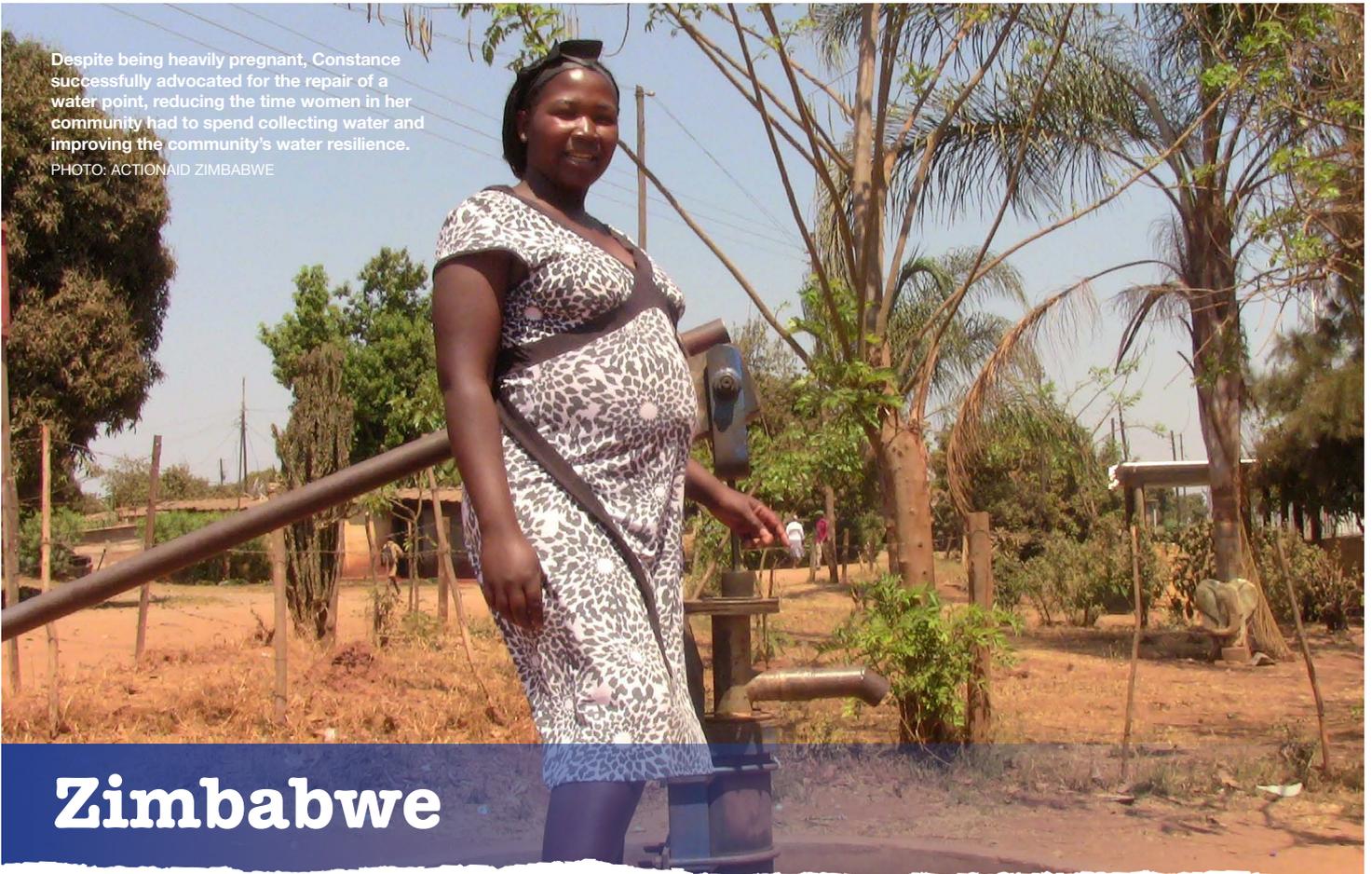


Women Overcoming Unpaid Care Work to Lead Resilience: A Series of Inspiring Case Studies

Despite being heavily pregnant, Constance successfully advocated for the repair of a water point, reducing the time women in her community had to spend collecting water and improving the community's water resilience.

PHOTO: ACTIONAID ZIMBABWE



Zimbabwe

One woman's confident advocacy inspires water resilience and reduces unpaid care burden: Constance Mushayi

"This is what many other women like me go through in my community. No one really understands how water woes have a major bearing on us given the gender roles prescribed by society. After experiencing and seeing the struggle which young women like me were going through due to different gender roles associated to us, I decided to engage the local authorities and enquire why our community boreholes weren't working."

Constance's story

Constance Mushayi, 39, lives in Chipadze, Zimbabwe, a country which has faced multiple disasters, including the recent El Nino-related drought in 2016. Heavily pregnant and already a mother of three, Constance's daily struggle to look after her family used to start at five o'clock in the morning every day. Despite being seven months pregnant she had to wake up before the break of dawn and walk three kilometres

to the nearest borehole, so she could fetch water for her husband and children. The water was vital for laundry, cooking and drinking. Around the world, millions of women spend hours walking long distances every day to collect water for their family's vital needs. In the absence of any transport, Constance carried the water on her head.

"I am a pregnant mother, a wife who walked a distance of three kilometres carrying a twenty-litre water container on my head. I would come back home and cook, wash, prepare my husband for work, and make sure my children prepare for school."

After finishing all of these chores, Constance herself went to school to become a Developing Practitioner. Constance scored the highest grade in her recent English Language exam and is working to build her qualifications. In addition, Constance is a self-employed entrepreneur, making a small income for her family through selling electricity tokens and airtime vouchers.

Taking the lead for change

However, all of these commitments didn't stop Constance from clearly seeing the change needed to support the women in her community. Her town was facing a water crisis and experiencing erratic water supplies, exacerbated because there had been no running water to Constance's community for at least six years. In 2015-16 an El Nino-induced drought aggravated the situation. After realising the strain that this put on her and her other community members, especially young women, Constance decided to take matters into her own hands.

"I decided to engage the local authorities and advocate that they repair the broken down boreholes in my area. I first approached the Councillor for my ward."

By talking to government officials, Constance learnt that the closest borehole had been decommissioned due to unsafe contamination from old, worn-out pipes. Constance refused to accept this, and her struggle didn't end there. She continued to advocate and was referred to several different departments and officials.

"I recommended that they replace the old pipes with new ones so that we get clean and fresh water, which is potable for human consumption."

Constance's determination was boundless, and it finally paid off.

"On October 16, 2016, I received a call from the Bindura Municipality stating that they had fixed the community borehole in my neighbouring area, and that my community was free to access it. I was ecstatic and couldn't believe it. Now I only have to walk just a kilometre to collect water from the nearest borehole in my home area."

Constance's work is not yet done, however.

"They have confirmed that the borehole in Chipadze (even closer to her home) will also be fixed as soon as possible," Constance says.

Confidence overcomes barriers

Constance's achievements in providing potable water closer to home will make her community more resilient, and the reduction in time spent by herself and her fellow women on water gathering will give them even more time to engage in community activities. But it was a challenging process.

"As a pregnant woman even my ordinary activities strained me. Sometimes I would get so tired just collecting water each day. But all my family looks up to me, and there is no one else who can do it."

It was the confidence that Constance gained through engaging in local women's groups which enabled her to participate and engage with government officials, and therefore overcome these barriers. Constance is a member of the Institute for Young Women's Development (IYWD), a community-based organisation advocating for young women's and girl's participation in decision-making processes. Together with its partner ActionAid Zimbabwe, IYWD facilitated training of several young women, including Constance, on areas such as leadership, self-care, well-being, and the capacity to confidently speak out and contribute to dialogue. IYWD promotes rights-based strategic engagement with local authorities, governments and corporations, to influence and demand public resource accountability. IYWD works particularly with women and trained them because they are the most affected by the lack of services such as roads, water, and medical facilities in their communities. Constance was provided with the communication skills necessary to smoothen meaningful engagement with local authorities, as well as the understanding to demystify government technicalities and budgets, and thus was able to advocate for her rights and for improvements in her community.

Because Constance was part of this training and a member of the supportive women's group, she was able to have the assertiveness to advocate for her community. In fact, she walked so confidently into the Municipality offices that one of the employees asked if she was a Councillor herself.

Constance's local Councillor Kudzai applauded the young women's participation in council processes: *"As you can see, their participation has improved not only their lives but the lives of the community as a whole. While they are young, I am really impressed by how they are so proactive. Constance's testimony is just the tip of an iceberg – she and other young women have done tremendous work in this community, and they have advocated for social justice in a unique way."*



The training Constance received empowered her to confidently advocate for positive change.

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