

A photograph of two Black women in a village setting. The woman on the left is wearing a black top and a beanie, smiling. The woman on the right is wearing a purple top and a pink jacket, also smiling. They are standing in front of traditional thatched-roof houses.

# women in leadership

"As a Christian female leader, the basis of who I am is who God says I am in His Word, and this has helped young girls find their value in who God says they are and not what culture or tradition says."

— Sharon Intauno  
Area Director in Zimbabwe

# WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP REPORT

Stories from African Women



**She is on the dusty road,** a baby wrapped snugly to her back, a water jug on her hip. What has been will be again; what has been done will be done again. Her family and her culture determine her daily tasks.

**She is waking before the sun,** catching the bus to the city center, waiting for crowded public transportation to attend classes for her degree. One day, her degree will help her make an impact on her family and her community.

**She is with the lonely girl,** a high school student she met last week. They chat as they walk through the streets, and the Lord does His work to cultivate a friendship. One day, this will be another branch on her Leadership Tree.

**This is the African woman.**

**Rich and poor** have this in common: the Lord is the Maker of them all, and He made the African woman the same way He made the American woman: juggler of jobs, children, home, relationships, commitments. And, right now, He is using the African woman in partnership with Young Life to make an enormous impact in the Kingdom.



**This *Women in Leadership Report* is the first of its kind, intended to paint a broad picture of an African woman's daily life: the joys, the trials, the triumphs and the losses. This picture will allow you to experience and to understand just how incredible are the women of Young Life Africa, those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Africa, "Your God reigns!"**

**Young Life Africa Women's Leadership Initiative** empowers and develops thousands of female leaders for Christ across Africa to increase Young Life's impact on girls and young women in the region. The initiative, begun in 2010 by Dyan Larmey (pictured right), African Staff Development director and wife of Senior Vice President Steve Larmey, reaches not just Campaigners and volunteer leaders, but staff women at every level of leadership.



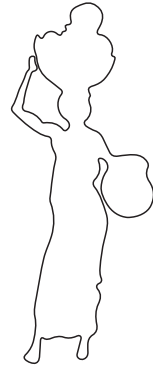
All staff and leadership — men and women — across Africa are engaged at every training and leadership gathering with tools and vision to reach more young women and to help women exercise the call and gifts God puts in their lives. Also, top female leaders are connected with one another to empower, share best practices, pray and strategize.

Senior women leaders are selected to meet regularly for extensive leadership training and development. Country coordinators meet throughout the year via technology and gather together annually to create synergy, pray, plan and expand female leadership.



## In 2017 ...

- **43 percent** of Young Life Africa staff is made up of women.
- **16,019** young women gave their lives to Christ.
- **One in two** girls who attended Young Life camp in 2017 gave *their lives* to Christ.



*The Lord does mighty things with His gospel when carried by the feet of women.*



## Her Daily Reality



While progress has been made toward female empowerment in Africa, there are still many obstacles standing in the way of a woman's leadership development.

But the women who are empowered, the ones who overcome, the ones who embrace their God-given gifts for leadership — they are truly heroes.



These women strive to — and succeed in — leading others to Christ because they live out the gospel boldly and bravely. They live faithfully where the Lord has called them, despite dwelling in a culture whose conditions are not for them. From wage gaps to unequal gender roles to educational inequality, these women are living in a world that is explicitly patriarchal. But it's here that they respond to the call to lead both men and women to Christ, to take up the charge of introducing middle and high school-aged teens to Jesus Christ and help them grow in their faith.

**“In Ethiopia, culture dictates that women belong in the home, making it a challenge for girls in Young Life to go to camp or lead.”** — Fireselam “Frey” Assefa

**“Women and girls are traditionally taught to refrain from voicing their opinions in the presence of men.”** — Banji Simasiku

**“Educating a girl child is not a priority ... Girls are expected to stay at home with their moms and take care of their siblings.”** — Chimwemwe “Chim” Siyabu Mhango

**“As a female leader, one almost always has to choose between being a leader or being married. The two are viewed as too separate to coexist.”** — Sharon Intauno

There is nothing new under the sun, and gender inequality does not stop our Lord. We need only look between the pages of our Bibles to find a similar society in which the Lord equipped and entrusted women to bring the good news first.

Despite all of this, a woman's value is found in the Lord, not in what society says about them. And when the Lord calls a woman to lead, He won't allow social standards to stand in the way of His calling. **God is in the business of transforming African countries.**



The rest of this report details how these women are challenging social norms in order to bring Jesus to the young women of their country — *in their own voices, with their own stories*.

### **Chimwemwe Siyabu Mhango — Divisional Executive Administrator, Africa**

Chim (pictured right) now serves as the divisional executive administrator for Young Life Africa, but originally served on staff in Malawi. She was first introduced to Young Life through her boyfriend and later husband, Lusayo Mhango. In December 2013, Lusayo was tragically killed in an automobile accident, but Chim has continued to pioneer logistics and administration and to mentor women Young Life leaders.



“One of the many blessings God has given me in my life is a gift of older successful women. Before I went to college, I had an opportunity to sit under the counsel of so many women who planted words of courage and success in my life. They shared their lives with me and told me how they struggled as women to be in leadership positions both at work and in church, how they persevered and trusted that God had blessed them with skills to accomplish what He wants them to accomplish. One lady once told me, ‘I am worth the blood of Jesus, and that makes me more special than I can imagine!’ Watching these women lead gave me hope and assurance that I can be a leader even in a society where the struggle of having female leaders is real.”

### **Fireselam “Frey” Assefa — Regional Director, Ethiopia**

Frey (pictured below) is one of the first female regional directors in all of Young Life Africa. In addition to serving as regional director, Frey does ministry at a girls’ orphanage in Addis Ababa.



“Leadership is not about being on the top. It’s about going down and serving others to help them to be successful. A leader is a person who can lead and who has a follower, one who is humble, understanding and a decision maker.”

### **Diana Nkhoma — Area Director, Malawi**

Diana (pictured right) came to Christ through Young Life. Today she stands as an encourager in her community, leading kids toward Jesus.



“They [fellow staff women] are not just great female leaders, they are great leaders and that’s what inspires me. The fact that these women have gone before me and have taken the time to teach me and to hold my hand in my first steps allows me to do the same for others. The women I get to serve also encourage me; they are young but they are very passionate about God and serving teenagers around them through Young Life. The fact that they persist even amidst the challenges at home and find a way for their family expectations and their passion for ministry to coexist has been encouraging.

“I believe God is using Young Life to change how people look at women in leadership in Africa because it is a ministry where women are encouraged to serve with their full potential. It’s a place where, unlike other places, women are there to build one another up; there is a sense of sisterhood that is becoming the foundation that our ministry is built on. The fact that women are valued as women, but are also built up to become great leaders, is opening people’s eyes ... (and) breaking misconceptions about what women in leadership are typically thought to be.”



### **Linda Mpando — Area Director, Malawi**



Linda (pictured left) devoted her life to Christ at age 14 during her grandmother’s prayer group meeting. She attributes her leadership gifts to her mother, who inspired her and instilled self-confidence from an early age.

“Many times, I have found that being a woman in leadership can be a lonely thing because a lot of peers in leadership are men. In the short time that I have been a leader, I have seen some girls grow up into more confident versions of themselves and watched them desire to lead others. Seeing such growth helps me realize that, though slow and small sometimes, I have a worthy investment to make in the lives of the girls around me.

“I believe a lot more women and girls can rise up and take their place if the rest of us speak truth and life into them, call out their strengths and give them opportunities to lead, walking beside them the whole time.”

**“We say it takes a village to raise a child. Really, it takes a whole village of women to raise a girl to become the kind of woman who’s courageous and who others can follow.”**





## Sharon Intauno — Area Director, Zimbabwe

Sharon (pictured right) began attending Young Life while she was in high school. Sharon runs club in five different neighborhoods in the northern area of Bulawayo, trains over 30 leaders and mentors girls in her community.



“Unfortunately, in leadership positions, strategic and strong women are less desirable, because women are supposed to be a lot more like mothers than bosses. The same rules do not apply to men in leadership.

**“As a woman, I must work twice as hard to accomplish anything. There is that pressure to ‘prove’ that I can lead. As such, we are faced with a situation where the number of female leaders shrinks as the roles become greater.**

“As a Christian female leader, the basis of who I am is who God says I am in His Word. I want to help young girls find their value in who God says they are and not what culture or tradition says.



“The senior female leaders and I have been deliberate about discipling young girls and encouraging sisterhood instead of competition and strife. This I believe is raising a cohort of female leaders who are braver and who support each other. I have been inspired to be resilient despite the challenges women face. It is possible to lead as a woman. I’ve been given opportunities, raised up and highly celebrated by female leaders.”

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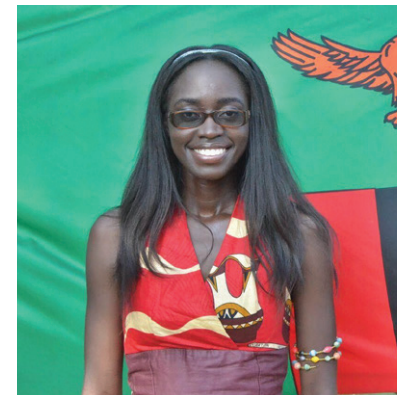
## Jokebed Coulibaly — Area Director, Mali

“I know the Lord is doing something right now. In my area, we have more female team leaders than male. We have even more female Campaigners than male. I think God is encouraging other women through my life to serve Him despite these challenges we face.



“Christ looks so different from anything else, and it’s by His grace that we succeed in breaking through the boundaries and walls built by society, culture and religion in order to reach freedom and truth as a refuge for the generations to follow us. I receive hope through God’s Word, where I have read that despite the Jewish culture of the time, God used women to change situations such as Esther, Deborah and more. We can also find in the Bible where God used the lives of women to challenge the realities and public opinions. This has impacted my faith for my country, for the women of my country and for the salvation of all.”

## Banji Simasiku — Area Director, Zambia



Banji (pictured left) runs two WyldLife clubs and a Young Life club in Ndola, Zambia. “In recent times, especially in the cities, women have played bigger and more vital roles, even in leadership. I come from the city of Ndola, which is in the Copperbelt province. My mom was raised in a village where her father was a primary school teacher at the village school. She attended prestigious secondary and university schooling, and now is the head at a private school. It is from her that I’ve primarily learned and seen that a girl’s role in society can be influential too.

“It is important to let younger girls know that they too have all the opportunities to be whatever they want to be. Whether it’s having a big leadership position in a company or the country, building their own houses, buying their own cars or something bigger than we can even imagine — **the sky is the limit.**”





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## Hirut Berassa — Regional Director, Ethiopia

Hirut (pictured right) Berassa serves as one of the first female regional directors of Young Life Africa. Hirut has pioneered Young Life in many cities outside of Addis Ababa and continues to build ministries all over the country from the ground up. Over the years, she has developed objectives for her own leadership paradigm. She believes “leading by example is key to motivating young women to be leaders in their communities.” She has found the importance of being a deep listener and cultivating her own spiritual maturity so that she can foster spiritual growth within these young women. Hirut also encourages the holistic health of women leaders, “I challenge them to grow mentally, spiritually and physically.” Above all, she expressed, “my goal as a leader is to love my neighbor, share the word of God and pray together.”



**Through their stories and their words, we all receive the courage to lift our heads and proclaim the gospel, no matter our circumstances. Whether you are a woman or a man, an African or an American, all of us can learn from our sisters in Christ in Young Life Africa. Through their perseverance, prayers and God’s provision of the Holy Spirit, many young African women are meeting Jesus.**

**Through the women of Young Life Africa, future generations of leaders in these countries will know Jesus. They will take a stand against corruption and violence. They will step forward into the growth of hope, peace and the light of Christ.**



“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”

— 1 Peter 2:9-10

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**Want to join hands with these women?**  
Visit our website, [africa.younglife.org](http://africa.younglife.org), for opportunities to pray, to go and to give to the ministry of women who serve with Young Life Africa.

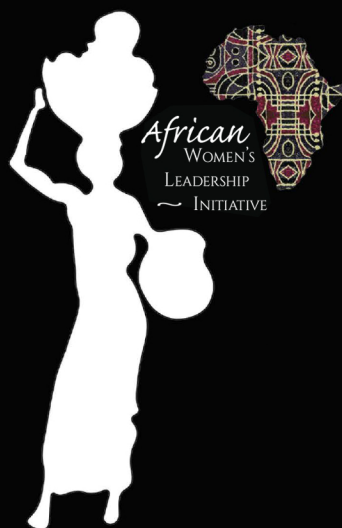
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