

## «My rights, my Energy»

By Rita Tiriboyi

*"Our time is now - our rights, our future", the 10th International Girls' Day will take place on October 11. fepa partners from all over Zimbabwe will be active together on this day. Rita Tiriboyi (29) draws her motivation for her social and socio-political commitment from her own childhood experiences. She describes in the fepa journal her commitment against the discrimination of girls and young women.*

I was born in 1993 and I am a survivor of various forms of gender-based violence. My parents divorced when I was a young child and I grew up with my grandmother. From a young child to teenage years, I was exposed to all forms of violence. Nevertheless, with the help of benefactors, I managed to attend primary and secondary school. In 2014, I graduated from Belvedere Technical Teachers' College in Harare with a diploma in education. YETT's Women Rise and Excel program provided me with a foundation course and mentorship in leadership and personal development. It unlocked my potential and helped me discover my purpose.

Today, I am a young married woman, educator, author, activist, and youth and gender advocate, involved in various civil society organizations in Zimbabwe. I have co-authored three school physical education and public performance textbooks published by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education in Zimbabwe. Currently I am studying for a BA level in physical education.

In November 2020, we registered a community initiative called Ree Inspiration for Girl Child Empowerment (RIGE). RIGE was born out of the reality of my life. My experiences as a young girl and teen sparked an unquenchable fire in me and an urgent desire to liberate the mindset of young girls and women. I saw how socio-economic challenges, especially in rural and semi-urban communities, were stifling girls' lives and futures.

I emphasized solution-based thinking to provide girls and young women with pathways to realize their potential. Our goal is to build and enhance the leadership, entrepreneurial, social and intellectual skills of 10- to 24-year-olds. We conduct courses in sports, arts, sex education, and health education, and we provide psychosocial support and motivational training. We also enable girls and young women to access economic development programs and have their interests represented in development processes. And, of course, we mobilize resources to achieve these goals.

### **Male privilege in Zimbabwe and women's disadvantages**

Within the RIGE vision, we have identified a lot of inequalities. Most inequalities and injustices stem from the fact that communities are predominantly patriarchal. This makes men superior beings to women. Statistics show that there are more women than men in Zimbabwe, but in politics, men occupy the most influential leadership positions. For example, we have a male president and two male vice presidents. Men and women are also not equally represented in the Zimbabwean parliament. This also affects political leadership positions at the provincial, district and village levels. Most institutions and parastatals in Zimbabwe are headed by men. Ministerial positions are also largely held by men. This shows that women

are treated unfairly in decision-making and access to positions of power. This is another reason why laws are passed here that do not protect women's rights and interests.

### **Discrimination against girls**

It is socially acceptable for men to "own" women. In most social and religious institutions, women should be subordinate to men. For example, in our Zimbabwean and some other African cultures, a man may marry many women, but a woman may marry only one man. Sometimes fathers marry off their daughters without their consent in exchange for money or material benefits, but the boys are involved in important decisions about their lives. Fathers neglect their duty to look after the welfare of their female children. This has led to an increase in child marriages, teenage pregnancies and school dropouts.

Furthermore, there are many social taboos and myths that prevent women from participating in many activities. Women are denied access to information that benefits them. Women suffer from inadequate access to health care, resulting in a high number of deaths in childbirth and other health risks.

There have been a number of recent cases in Zimbabwe of young, old, and married women being raped by men on their way from school, church, or while riding public transportation. Most women are harassed, beaten or killed when disputes arise in relationships.

As an organization, we recognize the importance of reaching out to women and helping them fight for their rights and interests. We envision a world where men and women have equal opportunities to realize their potential and work toward their goals.