How Concern is helping educate families in Zambia about nutrition

One in two children in Zambia are suffering from chronic malnutrition and are classed as being stunted

SPECIAL REPORT

Ballymena and Antrim Times reporter Lorna McKay spent a week in Zambia covering the work of Concern Worldwide and viewing first hand the charity’s RAIN project in the Mumbwa district, which aims to tackle chronic malnutrition in children in a country where one in two are classed as stunted.

One in two children in Zambia are classed as being stunted – that’s a stark statistic and one which Concern Worldwide has been trying to address for the past three years.

If early indications are anything to go by, the charity’s RAIN project which was established in the Mumbwa district, central Zambia, in 2011 has been a great success.

There is hope that the once evaluations are carried out when the project comes to an end next year, that it could be used as a model project to be rolled out to other areas in Zambia – and even further afield.

Even the District Commissioner for Mumbwa district is full of praise for Concern’s work.

He admitted that local people needed re-educating about nutrition.

Praising Concern’s RAIN project, he commented: “I look forward to the day when the project is finished because that means the people have been re-educated about nutrition.”

Quite simply RAIN – Realising Agriculture to Improve Nutrition – aims to prevent child and maternal malnutrition among poor rural communities.

Working with Zambia’s health and agriculture ministries, the project has been primarily set up to tackle chronic under-nutrition as well as looking at how agriculture and gender equality can help address nutritional needs.

Speaking to Danielle Harvey, Concern Country Director for Zambia, it’s clear that if you can improve nutrition from an early age, it can make all the difference in a child’s development.

“If we can make those changes before a child reaches two, it can make all the difference,” Danielle said.

She added: “If you can produce food rich in nutrients, and eat that food all year round, it can improve the nutrition of both mother and child.”

The project aims to educate local women on growing nutritious food, something they wouldn’t normally have a say over as this has been primarily the man’s decision.

Rural farmers are more likely to grow maize and cotton because they pay more.

Through the RAIN project’s education programme, it is hoped that husbands will see the benefit to their family by allowing some of their land to be used to grow nutritious crops.

RAIN is supporting families to diversify the food they grow in their homesteads and to rear small livestock such as goats and chickens.

While most men were initially sceptical of the concept, there are some who have come round to the idea and are now reaping the rewards.

So far there are 180 small model farms or homestead gardens in the Mumbwa district, with 4,500 people benefitting from the scheme.

The project, which began in Muchena and Lungo villages, has been a great success. The Concern team visits the Luili health clinic where mothers bring their children to be weighed to check for signs of malnutrition.

The family now has different food every day,” Brighton said.

Local women are also seeing the benefits of a more varied and nutritious diet.

In Lungo, Filula Shakauma gave birth to twins two months early. Now three months and thriving, Filula says Jacobi and Bette are proof that nutritious food can make all the difference.

“Filula said: “Because of the work of Concern, thanks to produce and nutrients, we now have the energy to produce twins and the energy to then look after them.”

Shadreck Hanga’ndo and his wife Mainess Munamalamba, from Muchena village, established their homestead garden three months ago.

Going from growing maize and cotton, the family homestead is flourishing with a variety of crops including spinach, tomato, onions, sweet potato, okra.

Shadreck told me: “I really enjoy working in the garden with Mainess; the whole family is involved.

“We are growing 11 crops now and there is real variety for what we eat.”

In Lungo, Brighton Mweemba and his wife Catherine have just as bountiful a homestead garden.

Brighton admits that he had his doubts initially but can now see the benefits to his family.

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Children in Shabawa village, in the Milandu ward in central Zambia. Local families benefitting from Concern’s RAIN project are given goats and chickens as part of the initiative to curb chronic malnutrition in children.

Hunger Stops Here campaign

Concern Worldwide will launch their Hunger Stops Here campaign next week, a unique opportunity to help stop hunger for thousands of the world’s poorest children.

Every donation made between September 15 and December 14 will be matched pound for pound by the UK government, Mortons Newspapers - including the Ballymena and Antrim Times - is one of Concern’s media partners for this campaign, with features running across our titles over the three months, and information on how you can support the campaign.