



VISIONARY WOMEN INITIATIVE

2023 ANNUAL NARRATIVE PROJECTS REPORT

Donors	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- APO Bank Foundation - Germany.- Arkay Stores Ltd - Zambia- Holger Samba – Germany- Randy Shackelford - USA- Other well-wishers and Partners
Local Partner Organization	<p>Visionary Women Initiative, Rm 121, 1st Floor, NAPSA Building, along Umodzi Highway, Chipata City, Eastern Province, Zambia.</p> <p>Contact #: +260979176307,</p> <p>Email:visionarywomeninitiatives@gmail.com</p>
Project Location	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Mwandakwisano Community, Chief Kakumbi, Mfuwe Town, Mambwe District,- Chipata City, <p>Eastern Province, Zambia.</p>
Budget	1,200,000
Reporting Period	1 st January - 31 st December, 2023

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1. Introduction

The Visionary Women Initiatives [VWI] is an established, independent, non-profit and Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) operating in accordance with the laws of Zambia. VWI was legally registered in December 2021 with the Ministry of Community Development and Social Services department of Registrar for Non-Governmental Organizations under the Laws of Zambia and operates under registration certificate number RNGO 101/1655/2021. The [VWI] Organization has been established for the purpose of providing various tangible support towards women and children's welfare in Eastern Province, with the initial target beneficiaries drawn from Chipata and Mambwe Districts of Eastern Provinces of Zambia. The goal of the organization is to contribute to poverty reduction, secure livelihoods and enhanced local development with the focus of addressing gender disparities and children's rights.

It is in this light that Visionary women Initiatives in responding to problems faced by the communities of Mwandakwisano and Chipata, is implementing the Mwandakwisano Integrated Rural Development Program (MIRDP) and addressing many other issues in Chipata with funding from the Apo Bank Foundation of Germany and support from ARKAY Stores Ltd and other partners and well-wishers. The ultimate purpose of these projects is to contribute to the attainment of the Sustainable Development Goals No 3, 4 and 5 set up to improve Good Health and Well-being, universal Quality Education and Gender Equality, Increased access to Justice and improved Sustainable Livelihoods for the under-served population in Eastern Province, of Zambia.

2. Projects

I. MWANDAKWISANO INTEGRATED RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM (MIRDP)

A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was signed between APO Bank Foundation and VWI to take over the Mwandakwisano Integrated Rural Development Program (MIRDP) from their former local partner organization, Rising Fountains Development Programs (RFDP) in December, 2022.

VWI together with the APO Bank Foundation Consultant realised the need to overhaul the project and give it direction alongside a very clear operating structure that would enable the smooth running of the project with all the stakeholders aware of their roles and responsibilities.

Meetings with the PTC, VSLA, Girls club, Boys club, Trainer of Trainers, Teachers, DEBS and the community paralegals were organised by VWI at the beginning of the year before any other activity could be done, at their respective locations. The key objective was to introduce VWI as a new local partner for the APO Bank Foundation, take the stakeholders through the new operating structure and to discuss the work plan for 2023.

The initial meeting with DEBS and DESO at the DEBS office garnered positive feedback, with both expressing encouragements for VWI's initiatives and emphasizing the importance of collaboration. They welcomed VWI's activities for 2023 and affirmed their readiness to work closely with the organization.

Subsequently, a successful meeting was held with the PTC, VSLA, Teachers, Trainer of Trainers (TOT), paralegals, and the Boys and Girls clubs. The primary focus was on introducing VWI to the project beneficiaries and outlining the new structure to be implemented. Beneficiaries warmly welcomed the new structure, expressing their readiness to work with VWI while adhering to it. They recognized the value of the structure in providing guidance on their roles within the community and at the school level, expressing enthusiasm for the clarity it would bring to their activities.

I.i. Project Specific/Immediate Objectives

- Improving Basic Education, Adult Education and Vocational training
- Improving Primary Health Care for the School and the Community.
- Promoting Income Generating Activities (IGAs) for the Financial Independence of the School and Community members

During the period under review, Visionary Women Initiative implemented activities to meet the three objectives highlighted above. This report accounts for activities implemented between the period from 1st January 2023 to 31st December 2023 under the MIRDP project.

I.ii. **Details of Activities implemented as per specific objective.**

a. **Objective # 1: Improving Basic Education, Adult Education and Vocational training by December, 2023**

- To achieve the objective mentioned above, the following major activities were implemented:

Procurement and Delivery of School Support Materials and Requirements - The procurement and delivery of School support materials and requirements for the year 2023 was successfully facilitated by the Visionary Women Initiative (VWI) in response to requests from the school management and the Parent-Teacher Committee (PTC). With funds provided by the Apo Bank Foundation, a comprehensive list of school materials was procured, including books, markers, paper, chalk, and various other essential items as clearly indicated in the 2023 budget.

The initiative received positive feedback from teachers, PTC members, and learners, who expressed great satisfaction upon receiving the supplies. The PTC Chairperson conveyed gratitude to VWI and the Apo Bank Foundation for their support and encouraged both organizations to continue their efforts, highlighting the significant impact on basic education and the health of learners within the Mwandakwisano Community School.

School Health and Nutrition (SHN) - Additionally to the porridge given by Mary's Meals to the learners, an extra feeding program was initiated in the MIRDP project, providing food supplies such as samp, cooking oil, salt, and sugar. The feeding program, designed to span 5 months, aimed to support the nutritional needs of the 415 enrolled pupils, consisting of 199 girls and 216 boys. Following the disbursement of funds, VWI ensured the timely procurement and delivery of both school materials and food supplies to Mwandakwisano Primary School before the onset of the first term in January 2023.

Co-curricular Activities and Special Events - The project supported the school with financing the school co-curricular activities which included sporting activities, Arts, Exams and many other curricular supporting activities as clearly outlined in the budget.

Administration and Infrastructure Development - In the year under review, the project continued to support the school with 5 teachers, fully paid by APO Bank Foundation alongside the other 5 GRZ paid teachers. In addition, 20 Desks were also planned to be bought under this activity line but were not procured because another partner donated desks to the school. Bank charges and contingency also fell under this activity line.

14 days Girls Clubs training of 40 girls and women in sewing of School uniforms, machine sown and handmade sanitary pads - During the period under review, the Visionary Women Initiative organized a 14-day training session for 40 girls and women from the Mwandakwisano community. The training focused on sewing school uniforms, both through machine-sewing and handmade techniques, as well as crafting sanitary pads. Sewing, a traditional skill within the community, was enhanced through this initiative, encompassing various aspects of needlework, stitching, and needlecraft.

The primary objective of the training was to empower the participants by equipping them with marketable skills, enabling them to generate income through sewing activities. They were trained to offer services such as designing, making and altering clothing, with pricing determined based on the time and materials involved in each project. Additionally, the initiative aimed to address societal challenges such as unwanted pregnancies and gender-based violence by providing economic opportunities for girls and women.

Furthermore, the clubs involved in the project demonstrated notable achievements. They successfully sewed 10 uniforms, crafted 6 doormats, and produced two clay pots. Additionally, the collective efforts of the clubs resulted in

raising K 1,600. These accomplishments underscore the dedication and productivity of the clubs, illustrating their commitment to their activities and their capability to generate funds for their initiatives.

Below is a summary of participants:

SN	Clubs	Age between 12-15	Age between 16-24
1	Mwandakwisano School Girls Club	13	0
2	Tiyeseke Community Girls Club	3	11
3	Limbikani Community Girls Club	2	12

b. Objective # 2: Promoting Income Generating Activities (IGAs) for the Financial Independence of the School and Community members

School Hammer mill Business - During the 2023 project period, the Visionary Women Initiative diligently monitored the operations of the hammer mill business. Despite encountering various challenges, the business demonstrated resilience and made notable progress. A significant issue tackled during this period was the management of the ZESCO bill, which was effectively addressed by transitioning to a prepaid billing system. However, unforeseen events such as floods resulted in a temporary slowdown of operations.

To mitigate the impact of these challenges, proactive measures were implemented, including the temporary closure of the hammer mill to avoid incurring unnecessary expenses. Although ZESCO successfully downgraded the electricity connection, the project is awaiting the reimbursement of the security deposit as agreed upon post-downgrade. Overall, despite facing obstacles, the project team took proactive steps to address issues affecting the hammer mill business, ensuring its continuous operation and long-term sustainability. Through strategic management and adaptation to changing circumstances, the hammer mill business remains a vital component of the community's economic development efforts.

Mwandakwisano School Garden - VWI facilitated the procurement of variety seeds and seedlings for the boys' club, aiming to establish gardening businesses focused on selling produce. However, the initiative encountered setbacks when two of the gardens were damaged by elephants, leading to diminished yields. Despite this, the school garden, serving as a demonstration plot for all three clubs, flourished and became a valuable learning platform for both boys and interested individuals.

Despite facing challenges, such as garden damage and limited productivity in gardening due to external factors, the boys displayed resilience by exploring alternative activities like carpentry. While they managed to produce a table, its sale remains pending. The progress in carpentry has been hampered by a shortage of tools, hindering their productivity. Nevertheless, the boys have demonstrated unwavering determination to overcome obstacles and pursue entrepreneurial endeavours. Through adaptability and perseverance, they continue to seek innovative solutions to challenges encountered, showcasing their commitment to personal and collective growth.

Health -Trainer of Trainers (TOT): Broiler Chickens Business - During the project review period, the Trainer of Trainers (TOT) received funding to establish a broiler chicken business, with the aim of supporting their daily operational needs such as stationery, lunch allowances, and transportation. The business was envisioned to enhance the efficiency of their duties. Initially, the TOT ordered 200 chicks, but unfortunately, some chicks did not survive the transportation process from the supplier. Despite this setback, they managed to successfully sell 150 chickens, generating K10, 000 from the initial sale.

In addition to the broiler chicken venture, the TOT undertook the responsibility of conducting sensitization meetings on crucial topics such as cholera, family planning, and hygiene during the project review period. A total of 24 meetings were conducted across various locations (Village Action Groups - VAG), including Chiwowo VAG, Chenje VAG, Mwandakwisano School, and sessions with the two girls' clubs. These efforts underscored the TOT's commitment to community engagement and education, contributing significantly to raising awareness and promoting health and well-being within the community. Despite challenges, the broiler chicken business and the sensitization meetings demonstrated the TOT's proactive approach and dedication to fulfilling their responsibilities effectively.

Para-Legal: Grocery Store Business - The paralegals received funding to establish a grocery store business, intended to support their operations and finance community engagements. However, the business launch faced delays due to challenges in obtaining the necessary operating certificate. Despite these setbacks, the paralegals remain steadfast in their commitment to overcoming obstacles and obtaining the required certification. Upon receiving the certificate, they will promptly initiate their business operations, contributing to both their sustainability and community support. Additionally, alongside the grocery store venture, the paralegals conducted 30 sensitization meetings covering various topics such as child rights, the repercussions of early marriages and teen pregnancies among young girls, and legal education sessions. These meetings were held across all three Village Action Groups (VAGs) where the paralegals are actively involved. Notably, the paralegals successfully resolved 10 different cases during this period, addressing issues ranging from early marriages to land disputes and child support within the Mwandakwisano community. These efforts demonstrate the significant impact of the paralegals' initiatives in promoting legal awareness and resolving community issues effectively.

Boys Clubs: Procurement of Bicycles - During the project review period, the Visionary Women Initiative procured three bicycles for the boys' club with the intention of facilitating the transportation of vegetables to the market for sale. Regrettably, all the vegetables sustained damage due to animal interference, rendering the bicycles currently unused and stored at the school. However, plans are in place to deliver the bicycles to the clubs once they are prepared to utilize them for their intended purpose. Despite the setback caused by the damage to the vegetables, the provision of bicycles reflects VWI's commitment to supporting the economic activities of the boys' club. These bicycles represent an investment aimed at enhancing the club's ability to transport goods efficiently, thereby empowering them to engage in productive ventures within their community. Despite the initial challenge, VWI remains dedicated to fostering the boys' club's economic growth and sustainability through strategic initiatives such as this one.

Community Women VSLAs: Loan Funds Top-up - During the project review period, the VSLA groups displayed commendable dedication to their savings activities, maintaining their operations efficiently within their respective groups. Notably, the VSLA groups expanded from 7 to 9, indicating their growth and organizational strength. Each of the initial seven groups received loan top-ups and successfully repaid them, demonstrating their financial responsibility and reliability.

Moreover, adhering to the agreement made at the project's outset in 2023, the groups contributed 5% of their savings to the school and bought foot ware and T-shirt showcasing their commitment to community development. Despite facing challenges, such as the absence of planned meetings with paralegals, the VSLA groups persevered and conducted a total of 24 meetings each. These gatherings addressed various topics beyond savings, including household challenges involving spouses and children.

Although all the anticipated meetings with paralegals did not occur as planned, the VSLA groups showcased resilience and resourcefulness in addressing issues within their communities. Overall, the VSLA groups have demonstrated remarkable progress, dedication to their financial goals, and active engagement in community affairs, reflecting their strong commitment to collective empowerment and sustainable development.

c. Objective # 3: Promoting School and Community Programs Sustainability

5 years Strategic Plan Development of the MIRDP - During the project review, the Visionary Women Initiative undertook the crucial task of developing a comprehensive strategic plan for the Mwandakwisano School and Community project. The strategic plan serves as a roadmap outlining the project's long-term objectives and strategies necessary for its success and sustainability.

As part of this process, Visionary Women actively engaged with key stakeholders, including the Parents-Teachers Committee (PTC) and the District Education Board Secretary (DEBS). Their involvement ensured that relevant data and insights were collected to inform the strategic planning process effectively. Notably, DEBS committed to providing essential information crucial for the strategic plan by October, demonstrating a collaborative effort towards project development. Unfortunately the DEBS input was not shared until close of 2023 because it awaited the dissemination of the National Education Strategic Plan before they could share it.

Once all stakeholders have submitted their data, the strategic plan will undergo finalization and subsequent dissemination. This milestone represents a significant step forward in the project's development, as it provides a clear and structured framework for achieving its objectives over the next five years. By aligning stakeholders' efforts and resources, the strategic plan will enhance the project's effectiveness, impact, and sustainability, ultimately benefiting the Mwandakwisano School and Community for years to come.

Conduct 4 Days Training of 30 members from the TOT, Paralegal, VSLAs, Boys and Girls Clubs, Teachers and PCSC in Financial, Business, Organization Management and Governance in the running of the Maize Mill and other Community IGAs

- During the review period, the Visionary Women Initiative orchestrated a 4-day intensive training session, focusing on financial, business, organization management, and governance skills. Additional topics covered included preparation and interpretation of Budgets, Cashbooks, Cash flows, Business plans, constitutions, record keeping etc. This training encompassed 30 participants, evenly split between 15 females and 15 males, drawn from diverse community sectors including TOT, Paralegal, VSLAs, Boys and Girls Clubs, Teachers, and PCSC.

The primary objective of the program was to empower community members and educators with the requisite expertise to proficiently oversee their Income Generating Activities (IGAs), such as the maize mill, and other communal endeavours.

Throughout the training, participants were equipped with comprehensive knowledge and practical skills essential for financial analysis, business acumen, and effective budget utilization. They learned to accurately assess the financial standing of their community and educational institutions, identify areas necessitating improvement, and make judicious decisions regarding resource allocation.

Furthermore, emphasis was placed on evaluating the financial and business health of their respective groups and schools using pertinent financial metrics, alongside adept preparation and implementation of operating budgets. Crucially, the training underscored the significance of maintaining operational control and delineating clear responsibilities within organizational frameworks. By imparting participants with these indispensable competencies, the training aimed to elevate their managerial prowess, ensure optimal resource management, and foster the sustainable advancement of the community and its multifaceted initiatives.

Registration of the Mwandakwisano Community and School Cooperative Society Limited - During the period under review, VWI in collaboration with school management and the PTC, initiated the registration process for the Mwandakwisano Community and School Cooperative Society. This initiative arose from the recognition that some community groups lacked formal registration, which impeded their eligibility for cooperative membership. Delays in registration primarily affected groups such as the boys' clubs, girls' clubs, and paralegals, who are currently in the process of fulfilling registration requirements.

Once all participating groups are successfully registered, the cooperative will proceed with its own registration process. This cooperative registration is pivotal as it will allow IGAs to diversify into various business ventures, rather than being limited to a single endeavour.

By broadening the scope of business activities through cooperative registration, the community and school stand to gain from increased economic opportunities and enhanced sustainability in their income-generating activities. This initiative marks a significant step towards fostering economic growth and resilience within the Mwandakwisano community.

d. Additional activities implemented

1x 2 classroom block reworks - VWI implemented additional activities, including the reworking of a 1x2 classroom block. VWI, along with Njobvu Safaris and the PTA committee, conducted monitoring at Mwandakwisano School to assess the progress of the work. Following the assessment, VWI and Njobvu Safaris identified areas for improvement for the bricklayer. These included repainting the office area of the block, addressing cracks on the floor and walls in one of the classrooms and painting the grill doors with black paint. After these adjustments, VWI and Njobvu Safaris confirmed that the reworks were satisfactorily executed, allowing pupils to begin using the building.

One challenge encountered was the lack of active engagement from the DEBS office in monitoring the reworks due to the absence of a buildings officer following the retirement of the previous one. However, after discussions with DESO, assurance was provided that efforts would be made to involve a buildings officer from another GRZ department when available. Despite this challenge, the construction was successfully completed, and students are now learning in the new building without any issues. The project was executed in accordance with the original plan, ensuring the fulfilment of its objectives.

APO Bank Foundation's Consultant's monitoring visit - During the project period, the Apo Bank Foundation consultant, Ms Christiane Borup, conducted a monitoring visit to the MIRDP in collaboration with the VWI team during her private visit to Mfuwe. This visit aimed to ensure the proper implementation of project activities and to provide support to ensure alignment of activities with project objectives and goals. The visit was successful in providing valuable insights and guidance to further enhance the effectiveness of project implementation.

APO Bank Foundation Annual Monitoring - The APO Bank Foundation conducted its annual monitoring in October to ensure adherence to the project plan and assess on-ground progress. The monitoring revealed both successes and challenges. Notably, successful courtesy calls were made to various stakeholders, demonstrating a proactive approach to community engagement. Initial monitoring activities appeared to proceed smoothly, with positive feedback received from both beneficiaries and APO Bank representatives. Remarkable feedback was received from the area chief Kakumbi who wrote a letter of appreciation to the APO Bank Foundation via their consultant, Ms. Borup.

However, despite these successes, some challenges were encountered during the monitoring process. These challenges included communication barriers, or unforeseen obstacles in project implementation. It is imperative to address these challenges promptly to ensure continued project success and alignment with objectives.

Overall, the APO Bank Foundation's annual monitoring serves as a valuable tool for evaluating project progress, identifying areas for improvement, and fostering effective communication with stakeholders. Through proactive engagement and responsive action, the project has overcome challenges and achieve its intended outcome.

VWI Administrative and Personnel Costs - The APO Bank Foundation contributed to the running of the VWI office consumable and staff salaries for the period January until December as detailed in the project budget.

e. Challenges

- i. Being an integrated project, the stakeholders of MIRDP need time to understand the holistic concept of the program especially that it includes community groupings that have very low educational levels.
- ii. Some project stakeholders have difficulties understanding the need to operate in a very well-co-ordinated structure and think it is meant to prevent other partners from coming on board to help Mwandakwisano school and community

- iii. Some of the community members did not understand why the MIRDP project has to operate through a local partner organisation
- iv. The school administration under the management of the previous head teacher became so dysfunctional that it affected the project implementation and reporting.
- v. Most group leaders are illiterate which makes their reporting very difficult
- vi. The VWI quarterly monitoring days are not enough to track all the progress and issues accordingly
- vii. The Mwandakwisano community still remains affected by the human-animal conflicts and extreme rainfall patterns that have continued to affect the household economic and nutritional statuses adversely.
- viii. Lack of a clearly documented project baseline to show clear project indicators has delayed tracking of the project progress accordingly

f. Recommendations

Based on the challenges faced during the project period, several recommendations can be made to enhance future project implementation:

- i. Strengthen Engagement with Stakeholders: Efforts should be made to actively involve relevant stakeholders in project activities. This could include finding alternative ways to engage with DEBS or seeking support from other government departments to ensure comprehensive monitoring and support whenever need be.
- ii. Improve Risk Management: Issues encountered during project activities highlight the importance of robust risk management strategies. Future initiatives should include contingency plans to mitigate potential risks and ensure smoother implementation, especially in unpredictable environments.
- iii. Streamline Certification Processes: Delays in obtaining necessary certifications for income-generating ventures, such as the grocery store, underscore the need for streamlining administrative processes. VWI should work closely with relevant authorities to expedite certification procedures, ensuring timely commencement of business operations.
- iv. Enhance Training Program Effectiveness: Despite successful training sessions, ongoing monitoring and evaluation of training programs are essential to identify areas for improvement and ensure participants' continued skill development. Feedback mechanisms should be established to gather input from participants and adjust training content accordingly.
- v. Foster Long-Term Sustainability: The development of a 5-year strategic plan is a positive step towards promoting project sustainability. Moving forward, VWI should regularly review and update the strategic plan to adapt to changing circumstances and ensure alignment with project goals and objectives with very clear indicators.
- vi. Strengthen Monitoring and Evaluation: Regular monitoring and evaluation of project activities are crucial for identifying challenges, measuring progress, and making informed decisions. VWI should invest in robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to track project performance and address issues in a timely manner.
- vii. The DEBS office should consider changing the school administration for a more coordinated structure and project implementation and reporting
- viii. The Government through DEBS office should introduce adult literacy education at Mwandakwisano School.

II. OTHER PARTNERS AND WELL-WISHERS

ARKAY Stores through their Chipata City branch of Zambia, Holger Samba of Germany and Randy Shackelford of USA were amongst some notable partners and well-wisher who came on board to support the Women, Girls and Boys welfare. Some donations were received for the purchase of girls under wears and a contribution towards tertiary education for a member of one of the boys' clubs. Other donations went towards VWI administrative expenses and

advocacy work, amongst which VWI featured on a number on a number of Radio programs and stakeholder engagements.

3. Lessons Learnt

Based on the challenges faced during the period under review, several lessons can be learnt to improve future project implementation: Implementing an integrated program in a community alongside Government and Traditional stakeholders requires patience, resilience, love and extra passion for humanity.

4. Conclusion

The Visionary women initiative (VWI)-led projects exemplify a holistic approach to community development, encompassing education, economic empowerment, and sustainability. Through strategic partnerships, proactive engagement, and a commitment to addressing challenges, the projects have made significant strides towards enhancing the well-being and prospects of the communities and their members.

ANNEXES/ATTACHMENTS

ANNEX I: PICTURES



Figure 1&2: Group leaders during the Financial, Governance and Business Management training



Figure 3&4: VWI during Courtesy call at the DEBS office and Mr. D Tembo during delivery of school materials and supplies



Figure 5&6: VSLA members after receiving loan top-ups and later show casing their business



Figure 7&8: Mwandakwisano School learners show casing their talent during Youth day celebrations and Ms. Brigitte from APO Bank foundation interacting with VSLA members

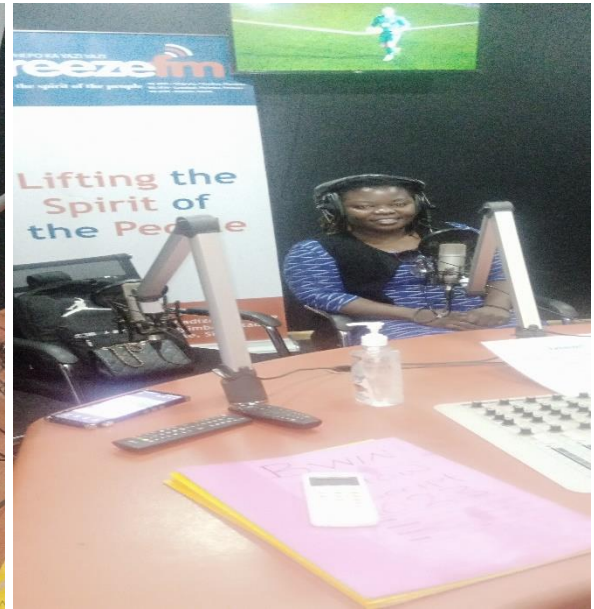


Figure 9-12: VWI CEO featuring on Breeze FM radio programs discussing a number of advocacy and community engagement issues



Figure 13 - 16: The VWI team during and after voluntary cleaning at Chilanga Clinic in Mambwe District on Int'l Women's Day



Figure 17-19: VWI CEO during and after meeting with Civic leaders (The Mayor and ward Councilors) of Chipata City and some stakeholders



Figure 20: VWI CEO and Programs Manager after meeting with Chipata DC and DAO



Figure 21 & 22: VWI Staff interacting with the Eastern Province Minister (Malambo Constituency Member of Parliament) and APO Bank Foundation Staff

Figure 23: VWI CEO interacting with Lucy Grand Foundation President in Chipata