

Josephine Carlsson was appointed as the Director of Feed the Minds in September 2007. In an email interview with Mrs Waltraud Jarrold, Chair of our Norwich Committee, she outlines her plans for the organisation.

What motivated you to join Feed the Minds? Lots of things! The challenge of leading an organisation focused on education and communication, alongside partner organisations in other parts of the world. I was also motivated by the fact that Christian values underpin all our work, I strongly believe that our faith-base adds a specific dimension to what we do.

I have been a Feed the Minds supporter for a long time, but the organisation seems to have changed over the last few years. Will you continue this? It is true that Feed the Minds has changed a lot, in terms of staff, the look and feel of our materials, our relationship with other organisations. Another recent change is that new systems have been developed so we are able to follow up on the grants we give to partners in a more efficient way. But change can be very confusing – I think we still have some work to do in order to communicate what has changed and why.

How are you going to continue to develop Feed the Minds' world-wide mandate? We have a group made up of trustees and staff who will be looking at the charity's future strategy over the coming months. So I don't have the answer yet! I would welcome ideas and thoughts about the future from everyone involved with Feed the Minds, my e-mail address is JCarlsson@feedtheminds.org

Can you tell me a few things about yourself?

I have worked in international development for almost all my adult life, and lived in El Salvador for two years, employed by Church of Sweden Mission. I have been directly involved in development programming as well as in communications. Since I moved to England five years ago I have worked for the International Save the Children Alliance and as Director of Communications and Public Relations for YMCA England. In addition, I have been involved in consultancy work with several leading international development agencies.

This issue of Connect focuses on women and literacy, why is this important to you? Many girls who are not educated grow up without the basic skills they need to improve their own lives and those of their families. An image has stuck in my mind for many years from an early visit to a poor Liberian family. When I asked the mother what she needed most, she covered her face and said; "That my daughter doesn't grow up like this. I want her to learn how to read and write, get the education I did not get".



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Front Cover Image: Teacher helping
girl at community school.
(Giacomo Pirozzi - Panos Pictures)

CONNECT8 GUEST EDITORIAL

'The Church has been instrumental in encouraging education for women. This commitment is demonstrated by the fact that today, within church-owned schools across the continent, female teachers make up more than 75 per cent of the staff.'

Bishop Thomas Omondi Oloo is the Bishop in charge of Kenya for the Presbyterian Central Mission of Africa (PCMA). PCMA is a partner of Feed the Minds and is actively involved in community development and theological education by extension in Kenya.



I'm delighted to be able to write that the position of women within African society is evolving, and in my view this is predominantly due to improved access to education.

It is gratifying for me to see that as the number of women holding senior positions within the church grows, they are able not only to act as role models to young girls, but also to campaign for even greater access to education.

While the focus of most campaigners remains on ensuring universal access to primary education for all girls, more recently female leaders within my church (the Presbyterian Central Mission of Africa) have been working to encourage more young women to stay on to undertake secondary schooling. Our research shows that this initiative has seen some real improvements, with nearly two-thirds of African

countries demonstrating increased levels of attendance at secondary school level.

The Church has been instrumental in encouraging education for women. This commitment is demonstrated by the fact that today, within church-owned schools across the continent, female teachers make up more than 75 per cent of the staff. Pre-school teachers and Sunday school staff are also predominantly female.

More recently we have started to see women make inroads into the world of academia. Although not widespread, we do now have female university lecturers and professors within most of the Christian universities across Africa. Academic achievement is still not easy for women, who are expected to shoulder the burden of domestic responsibilities within the home – however, it is possible, as these trail blazers have shown us.

'Improving access to education has resulted in an increasing number of women achieving academic excellence and I am seeing more and more of them taking up responsible positions within mission-owned health programmes; as doctors, nurses and healthcare workers.'

Improving access to education has resulted in an increasing number of women achieving academic excellence and I am seeing more and more of them taking up responsible positions within mission-owned health programmes; as doctors, nurses and healthcare workers.

One of the most widespread medical challenges facing Africa is that of poor reproductive health. I have also seen how female medics are playing a crucial role in the provision of family planning services, emergency obstetric care and general pre and postnatal treatment.

Women working within faith-based organisations are now in a position to help wider African society. One particularly successful project championed by female leaders within my own church has been the introduction of energy saving stoves. Designed to be both culturally acceptable and fuel efficient

the stoves reduce the health risks of smoke emissions and the need for women to collect firewood (a traditionally female task).

This initiative, led by women, has been hugely successful and many of our churches are now encouraging their congregations to adopt these stoves for their social and environmental benefits.

Sadly, women's rights have historically been weak within Africa, but I believe thanks to better education there are numerous signs of change. Over the past few years women have been given some additional rights relating to the ownership of property and inheritance. More recently women were behind a campaign in Kenya to introduce tougher penalties for rape and other sex crimes. The sexual offences bill, which is now on the statute book, is Kenya's first legal recognition of many such crimes.

Rising levels of literacy have also seen an increase

in the number of female authors within Africa and particularly within the Church. It is now commonplace to read motivational Christian texts that have been authored by women, while a number of Christian magazines are edited by women. Within the broader media it is no longer unusual to see women acting as news anchors on TV or working behind the scenes as researchers, producers or technicians.

My experience suggests that as women become increasingly emancipated across Africa, thanks largely to improved access to education, they will be better placed than ever to undertake God's ministry and to make an even greater contribution to the communities in which they live.

WOMEN'S LITERACY

A CATALYST FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

The lives of women in many African countries are changing. Feed the Minds is supporting programmes run by local faith-based organisations to give women access to education and the chance to improve their lives.

African women frequently miss out on education. Widowed by HIV/AIDS or with unemployed husbands and many children to feed, they are often forced into poorly-paid, physically hard and sometimes dangerous jobs.

Literacy schemes offer them the opportunity to realise their potential; this might be starting a small business or becoming a teacher or doctor. However they choose to capitalise on their newfound skills, their contribution is invaluable for

positive community development.

The many faith-based organisations that we support that offer such women's education programmes have a unique role in Africa. They forge close links with local churches because of shared values and because they know it's essential to have the support of local faith leaders; powerful figures in the community who can dispel resistance and pave the way for a successful project.

Working together on women's literacy schemes, faith-based organisations and local faith leaders make an enormous difference.

BELOW ARE JUST A FEW EXAMPLES OF THE PROGRAMMES THAT WE ARE SUPPORTING ACROSS AFRICA, WHICH WE KNOW ARE CHANGING WOMEN'S LIVES.

Supporting Women to Support Each Other

Evaline Aringo is a regional administrator for Manna Ministries in Kisumu, Kenya. The ministry has provided her with a job and a home. In return, she and other women employed by Manna Ministries, give back to their communities by training other women, cooking, caring for orphans and planting and harvesting crops.

Evaline knows how important Manna Ministries' programmes are for women in rural areas like Kisumu, as men often keep the income from farming leaving very little for the rest of the family. Through her job Evaline has seen firsthand the benefits of the ministry's projects. She is particularly proud of the HIV/AIDS scheme as Kisumu is one of the worst affected regions.

"Shortly after I started, I visited an HIV/AIDS project in Obwoso, western Kenya. We went out to one of the communities with a mobile team. We stopped at the home of a lady who was really sick. Her husband had just died and she had three very young children. There was nobody to take care of them. The home-care team arrived with medicine. The neighbours said she hadn't talked to anyone for two days. But when the team arrived, she turned her head. Some help had come."

"She smiled and that really had an impact on me. She was dying, but help had come. When I see what Feed the Minds is doing - ordinary people in the UK giving up their time and money to help others, and when I see Manna Ministries and Feed the Minds' work on various projects, especially HIV and AIDS, I am encouraged to stay on."



A counsellor talking to an HIV positive woman (Giacomo Pirozzi - Panos Pictures)



A health worker giving a talk about breastfeeding at a mother and baby clinic (Giacomo Pirozzi - Panos Pictures)



A health worker explaining the correct nutrition for children at different stages of growth at a mother and baby clinic (Giacomo Pirozzi - Panos Pictures)



A school teacher telling her class a story (Giacomo Pirozzi - Panos Pictures)

Little donkey, Little donkey on the Dusty road

Madame Jennifer Adabi lives in the local community of Vunania in the Upper East Region of North Eastern Ghana.

Her husband is unemployed and they have three children to support. Life is very hard in the Region because education and employment opportunities are very limited. During the dry season when food is scarcer and very expensive, Jennifer had to resort to selling any bits of charcoal she could find to make money.

Thankfully things have changed since Jennifer joined women's empowerment schemes and a donkey project run by Feed the Minds' partner, Our Lady of Mercy Community Services (OLAM).

Jennifer was given a donkey and a cart of her choice and received valuable training in how to care for her animal and how to use her donkey to build a business.

Now she says: "I am financially sound and can support my husband and children. I make money every day from my donkey and cart when I use her to carry water and goods to the market and back. She is about to give birth so my business really is expanding!"



Women collecting water from a well and using donkeys to transport it to their village (Karen Robinson - Panos Pictures)

Supporting Sunday Schools

Alice Onyango is a Sunday school teacher in Umoja, western Kenya. She is part of a scheme run by Feed the Minds' partner, the Presbyterian Central Mission of Africa (PCMA), to provide Sunday school teachers in rural areas with relevant and creative training materials.

“Before PCMA's project, we had no training materials which made it hard for me and the other women to teach our Sunday school classes. Now, using our training guides, we can develop interesting and interactive ways of teaching the children important social issues such as health, in particular HIV/AIDS and drug abuse, gender and employment.

"I think before when we had no training materials, many of the women in the community were put off becoming Sunday school teachers, even though they knew it was an important role that benefits the whole community. Now lots more are volunteering because they can see that the support is there and it's not so daunting."

"It makes me really happy to see more women coming forward to be teachers as it's a way we can develop our own skills as well as helping to educate our community. Being a Sunday school teacher gives me a really good feeling and I know this is true for lots of the other women too."

Lucy Njeri attends Alice's Sunday school class, "I love Sunday school because we learn about really important things like growing up and our health, but in a fun way! Mrs Onyango is a very good teacher and one day I'd like to be a Sunday school teacher too."