

SERENGETI PRESERVATION FOUNDATION

# How Women Can Save the Serengeti

The Serengeti is a dynamic mix of wildlife, habitat, and human communities. Conservation and human welfare are inextricably linked – and women have a decisive role in meeting the great challenges of both.

*Two existential threats face both people and wildlife in the Serengeti ecosystem: human population growth and climate change. In both instances, it is women who have the greatest role to play.*

## The Tsunami of Population Growth

Tanzania's population is projected to double by mid-century and quadruple fifty years later!

How can development possibly keep up? How can people be fed, healthy, and educated? How can protected areas like the Serengeti survive such an onslaught of human presence and basic needs?

Tanzania has one of the world's highest adolescent pregnancy rates: one in six girls between 15 and 19 become pregnant. It also has one of the highest child marriage rates, with 37 percent of girls marrying before age 18. Population growth around the Serengeti National Park is the highest in Tanzania.

A significant fertility decline can be achieved only if women are empowered educationally, economically, socially and politically.

Educating girls has a proven effect on reducing family size. When girls stay in school they have a reduced risk of becoming pregnant.

As a recent Brookings Institution study notes:

- *Focusing on girls' and women's education and health empowers them and helps stabilize population growth.*
- *Investing in girls' education builds female leadership in society, and women leaders are incredibly effective in conservation and protection efforts.*

## Climate Change

Tanzania is acutely vulnerable to climate change. Annual precipitation has decreased significantly across the country from 1960 to the present, and seasonal rainfall patterns have already changed.

Women have a key role here. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals state that we can combat climate change by "advocating for gender equality and women's empowerment in mitigating and adapting to climate change."

The Brookings Institution reports, "Studies show that female leaders are incredibly effective in conservation and are more likely to pursue more sustainable futures for their communities."

Climate change affects water and forests, both of which impact women. Water security, a critical issue for Serengeti communities, is under threat. The use of trees for firewood has caused large scale deforestation.

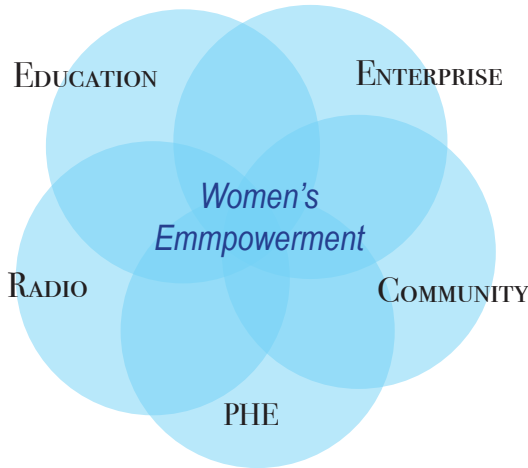
According to *UN Sustainable Development Goals*:

- *"Women play a critical role as stewards of the land, comprising much of the agricultural labour force in developing countries. They may be primary collectors of resources such as wood for fuel, as well as wild foods and herbs for medicines."*
- *"The most vulnerable people are most at risk from climate change, including many poor women. For them, the impacts are already a daily reality. Many spend increasingly long hours hunting for food, fuel and water, or struggling to grow crops. When disasters strike, women are far more likely to perish."*
- *Women need the capacity to protect themselves, and to participate in decisions with profound implications for people and the planet.*



# Women's Empowerment Program

We've developed a multi-faceted, integrated approach that promotes women's empowerment through education, economic support, community development, media, and health.



*Our holistic approach combines awareness, education, and action, all designed to advance human welfare and protect the environment. We've begun in Loliondo, an area next to the Serengeti National Park, home to Maasai pastoralists. Our objective is to further develop and test our program, then scale up and expand it to other communities around the park through:*

## ❖ Girls' Education

We are identifying girls who have the interest and aptitude for study and leadership. We will provide scholarships, expanding this program to include as many girls as possible. Girls in our current school programs are already acquiring enhanced education and mentoring to become change makers in their communities. We know that keeping girls in school reduces early pregnancy and lowers birth rates. They become new voices for change affecting income, family size, values, and decision making.

## ❖ Women's Enterprise Support

We are working with women groups to develop income producing enterprises. We plan to do this through granting micro-loans, finding markets for artisans' products, and giving economic support to women's social groups.

One example is bee keeping. We will provide women with beehives to install in sensitive areas, such as water sources and protected forests. They can harvest honey and sell it, providing an additional source of income. This will also directly protect whatever environment their beehives are installed. Beehives are also being used as "fences" to protect against incursions of wildlife into communities.

## ❖ Radio Programming

Radio is widely used and shared in local communities. Our twice-weekly programming on a local UNESCO sponsored station reaches tens of thousands of people. It includes women's issues with interviews, discussions, educational programs, and even feedback from listeners via social media. We want to expand this.

## ❖ Community meetings and activities

Local meetings and group activities are important. Topics include reforestation and the protection of water sources, both of which directly impact women. We have a campaign underway to plant thousands of trees as a buffer against climate change.

## ❖ PHE

PHE is an acronym for Population, Health and Environment, a strategic approach that integrates maternal and child health care services, family planning, and conservation. Over the last decade, dozens of international conservation organizations have built PHE into their programs.

We are partnering with Pathfinders International, who pioneered this approach and has worked in Tanzania for many years. Our goals are long term and ambitious. Our initial study indicated that there is indeed potential for introducing new programs that advocate for spacing of children, smaller family size, contraception, and women's programs.

Serengeti communities in Tanzania offer a strategic focus for introducing PHE and women's programs. It envisions the Serengeti as the epicenter of change that can radiate out and impact health and population in other communities.