

# *From Vulnerable Schoolgirl to Champion of Children's Rights*

## **Harriet Lukanda**

In a small Zambian town, a young girl named Harriet Lukanda stood at the edge of losing everything. She was in Grade 8, full of dreams and determination—but without the means to continue school. Her family, though loving and supportive, struggled to afford essentials like school fees, boarding costs, books, transport, and sanitary supplies.



Just when it seemed her future might fade away, CAMFED (Campaign for Female Education) stepped in. With their support, Harriet remained in school through to Grade 12. That turning point became the foundation of a lifelong mission: defending the rights of children, especially girls, across Zambia.

After secondary school, Harriet joined the CAMFED Association (CAMA), a powerful sisterhood of young women leaders. Within this network, she found not just opportunity but purpose. She participated in the Transition Program (formerly Shaping My Future), which built her confidence, sharpened her leadership skills, and prepared her to support others economically, emotionally, and socially.

Her leadership journey took her through the ranks—from cluster leader to district leader. In 2023, after an initial setback in by-elections the previous year, she was elected National Chairperson of CAMA Zambia. Today, she leads over 30,000 young women—many of whom were once vulnerable girls just like her—spreading hope and creating opportunities.

Harriet's work is grounded in the core rights of every child: the right to education, protection, participation, and dignity. Under her leadership, CAMA runs life-changing programs like the Learner Guide Program, the Agriculture Guide, and the Business Guide. These initiatives equip young women with entrepreneurial, academic, and life skills that empower them to rise from hardship and become leaders in their own right.

Through the CAMA Fund, Harriet and her peers contribute financially to support children who are at risk of dropping out of school. They provide uniforms, menstrual hygiene supplies, school books, and mentorship. In doing so, they uphold every child's right to go to school and thrive—regardless of their background.

Beyond material support, Harriet is a passionate advocate. She leads community awareness campaigns, engages traditional leaders, parents, and educators, and pushes for structural change. She amplifies the voices of young girls, making sure their experiences are not only heard but acted upon.

CAMA also plays a key role in addressing serious challenges like poverty, climate change, and gender-based violence. From teaching climate-smart agriculture to advocating for survivors of violence, the network is deeply rooted in building a safer, fairer world for all children.

Leadership within CAMA isn't about titles—it's about service. Harriet believes in inclusive leadership, building capacity within teams, and ensuring every girl understands that she, too, can lead. For her, the strength of the movement lies in the shared responsibility to uplift others.

Even when faced with resistance, setbacks, or personal grief, Harriet remains steadfast. Her motivation is fueled by the impact she sees every day: a girl returning to school, a young woman starting her own business, a community opening its mind to the power of educating girls.

Harriet's life is living proof that protecting children's rights can unlock powerful change. She rose from near dropout to national leader, not only securing her own future but creating pathways for thousands more.

Through Hannah's Little Heroes, her story shines brightly—a reminder to every young reader that your voice matters, your education matters, and your dreams are worth fighting for.