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Mrs Maselele, IPA's child welfare officer chatting with David and Lazarus in Dzivasekwa Extension. (see page 3)

Chiedza withdraws from school to support the family

Chiedza dropped out of school to look for a job at the age of 14. She was doing Grade 6 at a primary school at a farm in Mashonaland East. She was very intelligent, but could not continue with school because she could no longer afford the fees.

The family stays at Chabwino farm, with a disabled grandmother and other two children, Lucia (9 years), Shepherd (7 years). Before she dropped out of school, her dream was to become a social worker and help people in need. Chiedza has supported the family since the death of their father after a long illness in 2001.

"I have been helping my grandmother to support the family since our father passed away. As you can see, my grandmother is old and disabled. She cannot do anything. Being the eldest daughter I just decided to withdraw from school and look for a job to help support the young kids." Chiedza currently works in the fields or grading tobacco on the farm.

Since the loss of her father, life has been difficult, even when she has had regular employment. "Caring for the children and working is something I can't manage. I can't get enough money for food and clothes. Life is very hard as a casual worker. It's painful that I have had to drop out of school, but I found it better to go and work and ensure that we have food. At one point we went for a week without taking a decent meal and you can imagine how it feels for children as young as Shepherd."

Before the situation got worse, Chiedza was able to provide wheat flour, oil and relish. They have now resorted to eating sadza for breakfast as well as the other

meals. "Children like to eat good food, not to eat the same food all the time. As you can see they do not look healthy, because the food that we eat is always the same."

"We felt relieved when Farm Community Trust of Zimbabwe started feeding children at the school and the crèche." Young children at the farm crèche are benefiting from the FCTZ feeding programme, whilst those at school get porridge for lunch. The parents supply the relish.

What does the future hold for a young girl like Chiedza, whose enthusiasm has been deflated by the loss of a breadwinner? "I am not certain of my future. I am not sure what it holds for me. At one time I thought I should go to Harare to look for a job but I don't have relatives there. Also I have no one to look after my grandmother and the young children. I want them to continue with their education so that one day we can help each other. At least they should have a better life than we are leading. I would like them to be able to do teaching, nursing or office work. It's very difficult to plan for life, given the difficult situation we live in. Sometimes I have to borrow money for food or anything I need so I always have to repay debts when I get paid. At the moment I am managing, but I know this is not good for a young person.

"Of course I had a lot of potential because I was always number one in class and my father used to tell me that he wanted me to be someone in life so that I can support other children, but here I am now. He is no more and I am taking care of other children. We only count days as they come, for we do not know how the future will treat us," said Chiedza.

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Editorial

Cyclone Japhet came and went and left a trail of damage to property, crops and human life. In Muzarabani more than 6,000 people were affected, whilst other parts of the country suffered similarly. After this experience, perhaps it's time to review our preparedness and response to such disasters.

The flood caught people unaware, and some of those affected have not yet received assistance. There should be clear understanding of what an emergency is and what action should be taken when one occurs. Although we are currently responding to the drought, this should not stop us from responding to *new* emergencies, especially considering the immediate impact of the floods on the general livelihoods of people.

Some have questioned the idea of carrying out assessments before intervention, indicating that aid should come first before assessments. Admittedly, there is a need for assessments in order to make informed decisions when responding, but perhaps the team can also take with them the basic requirements for any flood victim. For instance, the Muzarabani flooding was not something new to us and it was clear that the affected people were in need of immediate food assistance.

Another area that requires attention is the early warning system, which has greatly affected emergency and disaster management. When the news came out that Zimbabwe was going to be hit by a tropical cyclone, information was not immediately disseminated to the vulnerable areas. Instead response plans were activated at national level without effort being put on preparedness at community level. The planning focused more on reaction than preparedness. The media should have taken on the task of disseminating information to areas that were going to be affected. Some agencies took flood flyers to the communities they work with, a move which is commendable.

Many organisations seem to be fixed in their traditional areas, to the extent that they do not respond to emergencies that occur elsewhere. This brings into question our understanding of an emergency and humanitarian principles. The call for humanitarian assistance is to reduce human suffering and yet we are locked in those "traditional areas", whilst other people somewhere are in need of our immediate assistance. Saving human life should prevail over such considerations. If it means refocusing resources to save human life, so be it.

Having said that, credit should be given to those who managed to help in the time of need for the victims. For instance, Save the Children (UK) delivered 60 MT of food and relief kits to Muzarabani. Some were also sent to Nyaminyami where 50 families were airlifted from the rising water. HelpAge Zimbabwe also delivered blankets to Muzarabani. The immediate supply of maize, beans and cooking oil by the organisations made life easier for the affected families, although some have suggested that

the package could have included porridge for infants who may not be able to eat sadza and boiled beans. Save the Children is implementing an agricultural recovery programme, whilst the Red Cross is currently working on water and sanitation in Mwenezi to avert the disease outbreaks that usually follow a flood. There is always room to improve our response in future. As long as we acknowledge and identify the weaknesses, we can always address them.

A child explains the ordeal of being caught by floods

Two weeks after the floods in Muzarabani, The Emergency Preparedness team went to Dambakurima to witness the launch of an agriculture recovery programme by Save the Children (UK). The organisation responded within a day after the floods affected more than 6,000 families in Chidodo, Dambakurima and Chadereka in Muzarabani district. The team came across Trynose Mpezeni, a twelve-year-old boy currently doing Grade seven at Dambakurima School.

"We had rains for a week and everyone thought it was the usual rains. We were happy that at last the crops were going to survive after previous months of drought.

"The rains continued for a week without stopping.



Muzarabani community receiving seed packs from Save the Children

Members of the community never thought it would be a serious problem, since they had gone for some months without rains. In the second week of the rains, the water levels suddenly started to rise. We realised we were going to be in trouble. Had the water started rising slowly then we would have done something, but in this case it was sudden. The rivers were flowing upstream spilling most of the water kilometres away from the banks," said Trynose who was waiting to receive the seed pack for his father who had visited a clinic.

"It was on Wednesday morning when the situation got worse. Everyone was out now as most of the houses were in water. The water level rose to knee height. Community members carried young children, as it was not safe to walk on their own. We moved through the water to high land. I was feeling cold and I did not have better clothes to keep myself warm. All my clothes were soaked.

"We waited for almost two days before the water

subsided. We did not have food and safe water to drink. All the boreholes around were flooded. Even as I am speaking some of them are still not working. I finally just decided to drink the open water.

“On the 26th of February we saw a helicopter hovering around our area and we knew help was coming. But to our surprise nothing happened. As the water levels got lower, we went back home to find most of the food rotten and some properties were swept away by the floods. I felt pity for my parents who by then were busy trying to find ways of getting us food after days without taking a good meal.

“We were told the one of the bridges was seriously damaged. We were stuck and it was difficult for us to cross to the other side where we could get help.

“For all those days, we did not go to school. Even the teachers were also affected.

“It was on Friday the 28th of March when we saw another Air Force helicopter flying across and it finally landed. We were told that Save the Children (UK) had brought us food. Of course, I was relieved but I was also worried about whether this food was going to be delivered to us. After some hours the helicopter started bringing packs of food and other relief items. For the first time in four days we had a good meal and a good night since the package also included blankets. It is the most difficult situation that I have experienced in my life and I will never forget it.”

Asked what he thought should be the solution to this problem as this was their second time to face the same ordeal, Trynose told the Emergency Preparedness team that they should move to higher ground to avoid such mishaps. He also indicated that some community members are not willing to leave the area as they have stayed there for many years. “They always say it will not happen again so there is no need to move from the fertile soils.”

Chief Kasekete agrees with this idea as he feels they have to take care of their ancestors' land. “We can't leave this place because it belongs to our ancestors. They make the soils fertile for us. These floods only happen once and we can't run away because of one or two incidents.”

The people in Muzarabani area are extremely vulnerable, as they traditionally plant along streambeds and flood plains in order to maximise their harvest.

A 13-year-old boy heads a family

Two years after the Nyamunda family was relocated from Porta Farm to Dzivarasekwa Extension, Mr. Nyamunda passed away after a long illness. Mrs Nyamunda had to bear the burden of looking after the children on her own for six years before she also died leaving three young boys living on their own.

Today they are among the increasing number of childheaded families in Dzivarasekwa Extension, which has been in existence for over a decade now. Their parents were of foreign origin and they did not have relatives to look after them.

David, 11, and Lazarus, 7, are at Yamurai Primary School in the informal settlement. “We are attending Yamurai primary school where I am doing Grade seven and Lazarus is doing Grade five. Mashambanzou Trust are paying for our school fees.” Pupils are required to pay \$400 per term, and Inter-Country People's Aid helps the school with school stationery every term. The children go to school barefooted and without school uniforms.

“Mashambanzou Trust also helps us with a variety of food items and Inter-Country People's Aid gives us a 20kg pack of maize meal every month. That is enough to take us for a month.

“We have been alone since the death of our mother early last year. Life has been very difficult for us even before our mother passed away. We were taking care of her when she was ill. Getting food and other basics is difficult and we have learnt to do with what we get from these organisations,” said David. Daniel, the eldest brother was said to be out in the bush looking for firewood to sell.

The kids look unhealthy and their house is not regularly cleaned. Their blankets and clothes looked filthy. “We can't get soap to bath ourselves and wash our pots, plates, clothes and blankets. We don't have the money to buy soap so we only bath without it. We appreciate the effort being made by Mashambanzou and IPA, but we also need money to buy relish, soap and other things that we need to use for our daily life,” said David, who was preparing food for his young brother, Lazarus.

When asked what he thinks his future will be like without parents, David sighed for a moment before tears appeared on his face. “It is difficult to imagine how the future will be because I don't even know what tomorrow will be like. I am not even sure if I am going to write my Grade seven exams without a birth certificate. Even if I get someone to fund my education, I can't proceed without the document,” said David whose face was soaked in tears. “We do not know where our parents documents are, which makes it difficult for us to obtain the birth certificates.” The issue of birth certificates is proving to be a serious problem to many children whose parents died before they obtained these documents for them.

The Emergency Preparedness Bulletin is a monthly publication of Zimbabwe Network for Informal Settlement Action (ZINISA).

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The story of Simon Shereni

Passing through the streets of Harare, you come across a young boy in filthy clothes, innocent eyes bubbling with happiness as he approaches you. The look and a broad smile will certainly assure you that he is not one of those notorious street kids.

Simon is only six years old and he has been in the streets for the past six months. His mother passed away a week after giving birth and the father passed away a year later. Since then, Simon has been staying with an aunt, Tendai Chihuruhuru who used to stay in Epworth.

"I have a home in Epworth but for now I am staying in the city because there is no food at home," said Tendai. She stays with her four children and Simon. "To me Simon has become more of my child than a nephew because I have been taking care of him since the death of his mother." Asked how she is managing the fees of her two children at school in Epworth, she told the Emergency Preparedness team that she raises money through informal trading.



Simon Shereni

The money that Simon and other children get from well-wishers is used by the aunt to buy fruits and sweets for resale in order to raise money to buy food for the family.

"We beg for money from people in the streets and then give it to my aunt. She takes care of all that we get," said a jovial Simon. "Even if we get food from well-wishers, I do not eat, I give it to my aunt who will share it among us. We try our best to help her. In good days I can raise up to \$3000 a day but during mid-month it goes down to \$600 a day which is not enough for us."

Simon should have been doing Grade one this year but his aunt did not have money to pay fees. "I don't see her being able to pay fees because when we were at home she couldn't raise enough money to buy us food. If someone is willing to help pay the fees then I will certainly go to school."

The environment in which Simon is staying is a serious cause for concern. The streets of Harare are now flooded with street kids. Sexual abuse is rampant and this can endanger both mental and physical health.

Although the aunt indicated that they go home two or three times a week, Simon gave a different account of

their life in the streets. "We sleep in the streets every night and we only go home after some weeks. During the rainy season we pay \$100 to a guard in one of the buildings so that we sleep in a protected area. This is how we protect ourselves from thieves. Each person looks for his or her own cardboard box to sleep on and we do not use blankets because we do not have them. It is very rare for us to have proper meals apart from what we get from the streets. When things are difficult we sleep without food and I am now used to that. We wake up early in the morning to start looking for breakfast. It's not easy since many people do not buy food in the morning. We wait for lunch time when they start to buy food," said Simon who looks very healthy and promising.

"I only hope that as time goes on my aunt will be able to get employed or get money to buy many things to resell so that we can go back home where we are safe."

He also hopes that one day he will be able to attend school. "With all the problems that we are facing I only hope that when I grow up I will be able to get a job and support my aunt. I do not want her to stay in the streets. It's not good for her or for us as children.

As soon as Simon saw Nyasha Mudzongo of New Life Ministries, the interview ended, as he knew food had come. Nyasha is looking for an organisation that can take care of Simon so that he goes to school and grow up like any other child.

"When I see Simon, I see a child bubbling with a lot of hope. Life has been cruel to him, but I hope one day I will be able to find a place where he can stay," said Nyasha. "I will be very happy if anyone can help this young boy."

Resources Centre

SAVE The Children has an extensive resource centre with reports, papers and articles on disaster preparedness. The resource centre is situated at the offices at 10 Natal Road, Belgravia and is open from Monday to Friday 8:30 am to 4:30 pm for individuals interested in disaster preparedness and response. For more information on the resource centre contact Tapiwa Gomo at 793198/9 or 727508. You can email at resource@scfuk.org.zw

Recent acquisitions include:

❖ Rukuni, T and Jayne, T.S. Alleviating hunger in Zimbabwe: Towards a national food security strategy. Harare: University of Zimbabwe, 1995.

❖ Community emergency preparedness: A manual for managers and policy-makers. Geneva: World Health Organisation, 1999.

❖ Management of severe malnutrition: A manual for physicians and other health workers. Geneva: World Health Organisation, 1999.

❖ The management of nutrition in major emergencies. Geneva: World Health Organisation, 2000.

Question and Answer

Following the flood that hit Muzarabani, The Emergency Preparedness features an interview with Mr. Clement Mhlanga, a Save the Children manager who has been involved in the response and recovery programme.

EPB: What made you establish an emergency unit in your organisation?

CM: An emergency unit was established after it was realised that the response to the 2000–01 flood and drought disasters exposed gross underpreparedness in most organizations. The problems ranged from delayed response to even failure to provide relief aid at the right time. The floods for example, left thousands of people homeless, without food, clothing or shelter, aid only came in several days later. The non-food aid kits that had been set aside by Save the Children became very handy to the Tsholotsho/Sipepa flood victims. From that experience, we developed the idea of establishing an emergency unit. To date it has done a lot in terms of preparedness, response and capacity building.

EPB: Recently you have been active in Muzarabani and Musambakaruma. What experiences can you share with others who are in emergency and disaster preparedness?

CM: Experience has shown that emergency preparedness and response should start at organisational level, especially those involved in humanitarian work. There should be clear plans about what should be done in emergencies such as floods. Internal operational plans should be flexible enough to enable rapid response. This entails stockpiling of basic commodities that are normally needed in emergencies such as food, water purification tablets, basic utensils, blankets and shelter. Well-trained staff, good communications and reliable transport are key to the successful implementation of disaster response programmes. These have enabled us to assist disaster victims where we can. So far we have done it in Muzarabani in Mashonaland Central and Musambakaruma in Mashonaland West.

EPB: What do you think is the most important thing to do in emergencies?

CM: Coordination is very important. Without it, there can be duplication or gaps in aid to certain beneficiaries; duplication reduces the number of beneficiaries and increases the vulnerability of others. It is therefore vital for relief organizations to meet frequently to make contingency plans for disaster responses. Depending on the type of disaster, assessments and aid provision should be within a short space of time. For instance, after flood disease outbreaks are usually imminent. Mitigation measures can be put in place to reduce the impact of these. Delayed aid can also lead to loss of lives.

EPB: How can this experience help build a better response programme for both your organization and other players?

CM: Other agencies should have proper emergency plans and keep some emergency response kits suitable for a variety of disasters. This will enable immediate response to disasters. Relief organisations should also plan together to improve efficiency in the use of resources.

EPB: What is your comment on the general emergency preparedness in the country?

CM: Good effort is being put into emergency preparedness by many organizations as evidenced by the level of response received in Muzarabani for example, where a number of organizations such as Save the Children (UK), Christian Care, the Red Cross, Zimbabwe Republic Police and Civil Protection Unit to mention but a few, converged in a short space of time. However, there is still a lot of room for improvement judging by length of time it has taken organizations to bring tangible aid to the victims.

Relief organizations should establish an emergency preparedness and disaster response unit. Members should receive adequate and relevant training. Training should include real life situations so that when disaster strikes there will be more action than theories. Preparedness should also mean setting aside a meaningful budget for disaster response.

EPB: What advice can you give to other organizations involved in emergency and disaster management?

CM: They should attend workshops on Emergency Preparedness that are run periodically by organizations such as Save the Children (UK), the Red Cross and the United Nations Relief Unit. Emergency response should start as soon as you get the information. Theories are important only if they are put into practice. Emergency departments are vital if proper disaster management is to be achieved, but they must be supported with the necessary resources. The organization must also have a clear understanding of what an emergency is in order to avoid problems when responding.

ZINISA membership list

- ✓ Inter-country People's Aid (IPA):
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- ✓ Farm Orphan Support Trust (FOST):
Lynn Walker Tel: 309800
- ✓ New Life Ministries:
Jolyn Tel: 700020/2
- ✓ Martin Luther Church:
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