

Emergency Preparedness Bulletin

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Life becomes difficult for child-headed families

"I do not even know what the future holds for us, especially during this difficult year," said 16-year-old John Matume, looking down as he pondered what to do for his young sisters and brothers that evening. He wanted to register for food aid in Mutorashanga. John stays at Mutendamambo Farm in Rafingora about 40 Km from Mutorashanga.

He has already experienced how it feels to look after a family. He was 13 when his father passed away due to HIV/AIDS related illness. This made the situation even more serious as his mother had already died two years earlier.

For the past three years John has been heading a family of four children and an uncle who is bedridden due to HIV/AIDS. "My uncle is now too weak to do anything, and I have to wake up early in the morning to look for food. We have slept without food on several occasions. My young brothers look after my uncle while I look for food. We do not have money to buy medicine for him", John said. He also told the Emergency Preparedness team that their parents did not have relatives since they were of foreign origin. "Our parents were born in Zimbabwe but they did not have relatives in the country except the sick uncle."

The orphaned family used to survive off their plot of maize and the meagre income they earned from selling their labour. John has worked each day from sunrise to sunset after the death of his father. Most of the work was on farms in the district. This includes weeding, planting and harvesting. Sometimes he walks up to five kilometres to reach the farm before starting the strenuous day's work.

John stopped going to school at grade seven in order to support the family. His young brother Tendai, who is 13, remains at home to look after other siblings and the uncle, whilst John goes to work. He told the Emergency Preparedness team that things have become difficult now because most of the farms have stopped operating. "We get casual jobs here and there, but sometimes we go for more than two weeks without being called. This makes our situation even more difficult since we rely entirely on the farm." He earned \$150 a day for the farm work.

"Sometimes they didn't give us food and I worked all day



John waiting for food aid registration

without eating. I had no choice because I knew if I didn't do it, then there was no money to buy food. It was frightening being young as I was, but now I am a little mature. I can work like any other man."

John is typical of many children in Zimbabwe, who are bearing the brunt of the various disasters the country is facing. These include the devastating HIV/AIDS epidemic, poor economic performance, and the current drought. Social services have declined. Some young girls are turning to prostitution. There are stories of families selling sex for a bag of maize, and more children are taking to the streets. Many have dropped out of school. With communities so desperate, the children are likely to suffer more.

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Editorial

THIS issue of The Emergency Preparedness focuses on the situation of children in Zimbabwe which has continued to cause serious concern in all communities across the country. The effects of HIV and AIDS have become increasingly apparent and more children have become vulnerable to social and economic hardships. In addition to this, children in farm communities have had to contend with upheaval and uncertainty about their future, compounding and exacerbating the trauma they have experienced.

This has brought challenges in adapting and developing programme activities to cater for the emerging needs of orphaned and vulnerable children in urban and rural areas. The hardening economic situation, food insecurity and the social problems call for new response mechanisms. Many children have had to transfer from school to school whilst others have withdrawn because the parents do not have money to pay school fees.

Davison Mwanza of Rhimbick Farm near Mvurwi has not been able to send his children to school because he has lost his job. He further urged the responsible authorities to build schools and clinics in order to develop the area. "Life has become difficult for us. As you can see all my children are here when they are supposed to have gone to school. I lost my job and I can't afford to send them to school due to lack of school fees." Asked what he thinks will be the future of his children without education, he said his daughter who is only 15 is mature enough to marry whilst the two young boys can help till the land.

Organisations working towards child welfare have indicated that cases of child abuse and neglect have increased since October 2001. This trend has been attributed to many factors which include loss of jobs by the parents or guardians, food insecurity and disturbances in some parts of the country. Some parents in rural Mashonaland West are reported to have dumped or neglected their children in a bid to qualify them for food assistance.

Although many workshops have been held on child protection in emergencies, there is need for organisations implementing food aid in areas where only social welfare cases receive food to consider increasing the number of beneficiaries. Where general rations have not been adequate, wet feeding can be done in schools.

There is also need to increase the capacity of communities to respond to the orphan crisis. With the current hunger and high mobility, orphans are exposed to all forms of abuse. Children in farms also require attention. The most effective way to address this is by the coordinated action of all stakeholders to ensure that orphans' rights are realised at all levels.

Save the Children revives Zunde Ramambo in the Valley

In an effort to assist communities cater for the increased number of orphans in Nyaminyami, Zambezi Valley, Save the Children has introduced a Zunde Ramambo project, which will be managed by chiefs.

This results from a survey that indicated that due to the prevalence of HIV/AIDS in the area orphan numbers were on the increase. The report also indicated that polygamy has contributed to this problem. As soon as the father dies, all the children become orphans as the majority of them and mothers depend on their father who is the breadwinner. The problem has been compounded by the disintegration of families in the district, which used to cater for orphans.

The Zunde project has already started in Mola and Negande wards of Nyaminyami with the maize crop nearing flowering stage. Save the Children provided the funds for tilling the land, hoes, seeds and fertilisers. Although some of the activities are coordinated by the organisation, chiefs mobilise the communities to maintain the fields.

Each ward has more than three fields which the community tilled. After harvesting, the maize will be kept by the chiefs. The communities will identify needy cases and assist them with the maize. The organisation will monitor the distribution. The project is set to benefit children in difficult circumstances from three villages in each ward.

Chief Mola welcomed the move by the organisation. "We feel relieved with the introduction of this project. We had to use our food to help starving children in the ward. There are many cases of orphaned children who have fainted due to hunger. We are willing to help but sometimes we do not have enough for even ourselves," he said. He also assured the organisation that he will work with the community to ensure the project succeeds.

Mr Mutale, Save the Children officer responsible for the Zunde project, indicated that the project is in response to the needs of orphans in poverty stricken communities such as Nyaminyami. "As a child welfare organisation we felt there was need to help communities assist the orphans in their societies," said Mr Mutale. "We mobilised the communities and introduced the idea to them. They welcomed the project and the response that we got from the community is quite encouraging. We hope this is going to help them absorb orphans into their family settings as the harvest will supplement whatever they have."

The Emergency Preparedness team received reports that children were fainting due to hunger, whilst some parents are said to have left their children for more than two weeks to look for food. Save the Children has scaled up its beneficiary list from 6,000 to 12,000 people to reduce the effects of hunger in the district.

The story of Nyarai

With the current food shortage reaching critical levels, children have borne the brunt of having to spend days without sufficient food. Some told the Emergency Preparedness team that they have to eat wild fruits for dinner, and suffer from stomach pains. They cannot afford proper medical attention.



Nyarai waiting to receive her package of mealie-meal, beans and cooking oil.

We came across Nyarai Million aged nine at Vanad Mine. She is a beneficiary of a food aid programme recently launched by Save the Children to assist children in difficult circumstances in Mutorashanga. It took Nyarai some time to believe that she was going to have sadza after weeks of surviving on *hacha* (a wild fruit) and other wild roots.

Nyarai is a grade two pupil at Vanad primary school in Mutorashanga. Her father died two years ago after a long illness. Nyarai and other three children stay with their mother.

Leaning against her mother, Nyarai narrated how she feels about not having food. "In the evening we all gather in the house waiting for our mother to bring us food. We always have a pack of *hacha* to eat in case she does not bring anything. Our mother wakes up early in the morning to look for food." Sometimes the mother comes back very late and Nyarai looks after her two-year old brother.

Asked how she feels going to school on an empty stomach, Nyarai sighed and, with a shy face, told the Emergency Preparedness team: "I remember the good days when we used to have porridge in the morning, but now it is difficult to ask our mother to prepare porridge

for us. We go on an empty stomach. We cannot take *hacha* because they are kept as a last resort for dinner only when there is completely nothing to eat." She remembers a day when she became ill from eating a poisonous root. "I was at school when I felt pain in my stomach. At first I thought it was hunger but later realised that it was more serious than I thought. I was taken to hospital for treatment." Nyarai sobbed as she related the story.

Zimbabwe Alloys left Vanad Mine because chrome mining was becoming less viable and many people were left jobless. The community is now described as a ghost town. Most of the people are poor; they used to survive doing casual labour on the nearby farms, but these have stopped operations. Nyarai's mother also worked on a farm before trying informal trading. This has made it difficult for children like Nyarai to pursue their education, but she has not lost hope.

"I am studying hard because I want to be a nurse when I grow up. I want to help my mother take care of the other children. I also want to buy her food and make sure she does not work anymore." Nyarai's dream might come true but only if the necessary support is available. Her performance at school is good; her social background is the only drawback. "I would like to thank Save the Children for the food. We are going to have sadza at last." She hopes that the organisation will continue to provide food, as she hates looking back on the days she slept without any at all.

Voices of children in difficult circumstances

"Its not good to survive on roots and wild fruits. I hate it." Lutendo, 9, Binga.

"Caring for children and working is very difficult. I can't manage. I cannot get enough money for food and clothes. Life is very hard." Mildred Mugonda, 15, Chibweno Farm, Marondera.

"Life is hopeless – how can we survive without food?" Brain Phiri, Mutorashanga.

"I want to be a nurse but things are difficult for my mother." Nyarai Million, Vanad Mine.

"I miss my parents. I can't go to school because no one pays school fees for me," Samson Dube, street kid in Masvingo.

"Our stepmother chased us away because there wasn't enough food at home. We decided to stay in Masvingo town." John and Jonathan (twins), also street kids in Masvingo.

"Our parents left us two weeks ago to look for food in Gokwe. We are surviving on handouts from neighbours." Lucia Siamalamba.

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

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FOST facilitates community based interventions

Most organisations involved in emergency response activities are aware that food insecurity can increase the vulnerability of children to abuse and exploitation. In farm worker communities, especially those that have reduced livelihoods, this risk is high. The uncertainty and instability in these areas has worsened the vulnerability of children and affected the ability of implementing agencies to intervene to protect them.

On some farms, children were left alone as their parents look for work or food. Others have been victims of malnutrition. Early marriages, sexual abuse and early pregnancies are evident, subjecting children to a variety of abuse and posing a great threat to their welfare.

Realising this, the Farm Orphans Support Trust introduced a child supplementary feeding programme. The organisation also felt that there was need to protect vulnerable children from abuse and exploitation, so child protection education was incorporated in the feeding programme. Communities were trained to provide psycho-social support for vulnerable children involving the Farm Health Workers and pre-school leaders who are delivering wet feeding. In addition, FOST developed a programme with Family Support Trust aimed at supporting traumatised children.

Only last year more than 270 people were trained including Farm Health Workers, pre-school leaders, teachers, welfare staff, health staff, home-based care volunteers, ward counsellors, and other community members.

“The FOST programme has enabled us to open our eyes to child abuse and protection in our communities,” said one community worker. She indicated that they often felt overwhelmed and powerless to offer the level of support needed. There is need to build their skills in areas such as basic counselling and establishing “child friendly” environments.

Tsholtsho authorities faced with a tricky situation

The 2001 Gwayi River flood that threatened the lives of thousands of people is causing sleepless nights to the Tsholotsho authorities who are still struggling to come up with a better preparedness and mitigation plan to avoid the mishap again.

In March 2001, Gwayi River burst its banks and flooded the area from about five kilometres downstream from Jimila Rural Service Centre to Sipepa. Although no deaths were recorded, millions of dollars worth of property was destroyed. The communities had to start from scratch as most of their belongings were swept away. Until today they are still reeling under the effects of the disaster.

Two years after the incident no tangible solution has been put in place. The authorities and communities are

caught up in a tense debate. Due to land shortage in Tsholtsho, the authorities have resettled some of the victims in Lupane, 34 kilometres from Tsholotsho, whilst others are refusing to leave the fertile alluvial soils and the basic facilities that they are enjoying. The authorities are worried about the vulnerability of the community to floods.

The Emergency Preparedness team had an opportunity to visit both places. People in Tsholotsho are closer to most of the basic services such as clean water, shops, postal services, police and other important facilities, whilst the new settlement in Lupane is not accessible because of the poor road network. The Emergency team had to walk more than fifteen kilometres to reach the new settlement. There are no schools, water or clinics. The nearest place where these can be found is at Regina Mundi nearly fifteen kilometres away.

Nomsa Ncube is a one of the victims relocated to the new site. “In Tsholotsho we were vulnerable to floods and we lost our property. But here we do not have access to basic services. As you can see, I am pregnant, I need to visit a clinic frequently but because the clinic is miles away, I have to survive on the grace of God. My children have stopped going to school because it’s far away from here.”

However, the Acting District Administrator indicated that they are in the process of drafting a development plan that will see the construction of roads, clinics, schools and other basic facilities in the area. “When the disaster occurred, we had no time to plan but to remove people from danger, that is why we resettled people in Lupane. We are currently facing a shortage of land in Tsholotsho, therefore the only option was to relocate them in Lupane. Plans are underway to develop the area. We are also still negotiating with the government for nearby state land on which to resettle some of the people.” The Acting DA also acknowledged that the new site requires immediate attention or else people will go back to Tsholotsho.

This is a very interesting case in emergency and disaster management. We would like to hear from readers what you think should be done to solve this problem. In Tsholotsho they are vulnerable to floods, but the soils are fertile and they harvest even in drought years, whilst Lupane is dry and infertile area.

Disaster management equation

Development and disaster are two sides of the same coin. While disasters can wipe off years of development efforts in seconds, it is an irony to note that they can also be a catalyst to development.

It is no longer a debatable issue that poverty and vulnerability are closely linked. Development efforts meant to address poverty reduce vulnerability to disasters. Disasters can trigger projects that promote development particularly reconstruction projects such as

roads, bridges, health services and social facilities which are basic ingredients of any development. These services are mostly affected by disasters.

Is it always easy to determine the correlation between disasters and development or are the two parallel? How do relief projects promote development and address disaster or how do disasters trigger development in your areas of operation?

Is relief always an enemy of recovery and sustainable development or can relief trigger sustainable development? Please forward your comments to tapiwag@scfuk.org.zw or eliasm@scfuk.org.zw

Demand for early childhood programs is increasing

WITH a greater understanding of the importance of the early years there are increasing demands for ways to meet the needs of young children and their families. The new demands are arising not only from a greater understanding of children's development, but are also related to socio-economic factors, the shifts in family structure and the way that various disasters have played a negative role.



A child at a play centre

Agencies should get involved and engage families in the process of promoting early learning and development. Establishing play centres is not enough without their involvement. This is true even in the face of the different emergencies that have occurred so far, such as the food crisis. We can build a future by investing in them through livelihood development programmes. We need to revamp the once vibrant institutions and go beyond mere survival if children are to achieve full productive potential. Early childhood programmes, if properly done, can open up opportunities for children.

Significant efforts have been made to improve the situation of children, especially in poor communities, by providing food and other basic commodities. Early childhood programmes can be introduced to support their growth and development. Programmes should include not only direct services for young children, but also support for families, training and support for caregivers, child-centred community development, campaigns to increase public awareness, collaboration between agencies and the communities.

Resources

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 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:

- ❖ Alex de Waal, *Famine crimes: Politics and the disaster relief industry in Africa*. Indiana University: USA, 2002
- ❖ Hugh, Mathew, *Children and community regeneration*. UK: Save the Children, 2000
- ❖ Devereux, Stephen, & Simon Maxwell, : *Food Security in Sub-Saharan Africa* , Great Britain ITDG Publishing 2001
- ❖ Bill Forse, *Where there is no vet*. Great Britain, Oxfam, 1999.
- ❖ *Managing supplementary feeding: Introductory guidance notes*. Zimbabwe, DFID, 2002
- ❖ Amartya Sen, *Poverty and famines: An Essay on entitlement and development*. Clarendon Press: Great Britain, 1997

Please note that back issues of The Emergency Preparedness bulletin can be obtained from Save the Children Resource Centre at the above address.

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