



GIRL CHILD NETWORK



COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND EMPOWERMENT PROGRAM (CDEP)

PRESENTS

REFLECTIONS ON OPERATION RESTORE ORDER (ORO)

By Francis Chumachawazungu-CDEP Manager

Contact Details

Girl Child Network	Fax no 070-31132	Contact person
131 Duri Road	Email gcn@zol.co.zw	Betty Hazviperi Makoni(Director)
Tel 070-21509/ 31132	Mobile 091288251	091 288 253 091 288 255

Dedicated to Robert Mutusva and two other children who in their death, welcomed me into their lives, and also laid down their lives for me to write this presentation. Robert died on 19th June 2005 from head injuries that he sustained when a wall to a cottage that he was helping to demolish collapsed onto him. Robert was 21 years old.
May his soul rest in eternal peace

I believe a time will come when in greater understanding we shall have no boundaries anymore. We shall call the earth our country: and we shall, by a process of justice and international assembly, distribute unselfishly the goods of the world according to the needs of the people. But equality cannot be established by force, it must come from the heart We must start now, with ourselves. We should try to be like the divine ones who have come on earth again and again to show us the way. By our loving each other and keeping our understanding clear, as they taught and exemplified, peace can come. (Paramahansa Yogananda)

A VISIT BY STEPHEN

On 21st June 2005, a man visited the GCN offices in Zengeza 4. His name is Stephen Mutusva. Stephen is among the multitude affected by Operation Restore Order (ORO), an exercise launched by the Zimbabwean government to rid the country of “illegal” structures and business practices. The economical-socio-political, and psychological impact of ORO are as wide and deep as one’s mental capacity for inference and deduction. No sphere of human life has not been touched.

With regards to Stephen, ORO left him and his family bereaved. Stephen’s younger brother Robert died on 19th June 2005 from head injuries that he sustained when a wall of an “illegal” cottage that he was helping to demolish collapsed onto him. Robert was 21 years old. The cottage was part of the home in which Stephen and his family had been living. Stephen and his family were, therefore, also left homeless and at the mercy of a very cold June night. The family and relatives could only mourn Robert in the open. But this is not all.

A couple of days prior, Stephen had also lost his only means of livelihood – a tuck shop that he was running on behalf of a friend. Stephen was, therefore, also left financially in the open at the mercy of a very unfriendly, cold, and wintry economic climate. This is the story that Stephen carries heavily into the GCN offices around 12.30pm on 21st June, heavily because as Stephen narrated his ordeal, his eyes were downcast and he was emotionally struggling to be a “man” and maintain composure against the impulse to breakdown and weep.

As I listened and talked to Stephen, I also realised that I was also a victim of ORO, by virtue of finding myself reacting to what he was saying. When one becomes aware of something, and they react to it, then they are victims of the thing. The question is not of whether one reacts or not. With regards to ORO, rather, we can ask, “What does our awareness of ORO evoke in us?” Some react by being angry, others are jubilant, others point fingers. Irrespective of the nature of our reactions, we are all, ultimately victims of ORO – ORO leaves an imprint in one’s mind. Within this context, if one was to define ORO as a tragedy, then it is not only a Zimbabwean tragedy, but a global tragedy.

I accompanied Stephen to his “residence.” On both sides of the street, silently beckoning the attention of one’s eyes, are signs of the aftermath of ORO. There is rubble where structures used to proudly stand. Household furniture that used to dignify the inside of cottages stands undignified in the open. The furniture also seems to reflect the sense of helplessness apparent in the owners. The furniture more so the beds and wardrobes, however, seem to also “feel” ashamed and naked at being displayed in the open. On one bed, an adult is fast asleep, having probably spend the whole night awake guarding the furniture some people have also lost their furniture to thieves. Potholes, on the other hand, appear quite contended – they are “filled” up with the rubble from the demolished cottages.

At Stephen’s residence, one negotiates one’s way around the rubble and debris. Six women have gathered to morn Robert. A very “lonely looking” fire is burning lazily in the open. Two tired sticks are grudgingly offering themselves as the fuel. On the

fire, a little water is slowly heating in an indifferent five litre tin (probably a once proud container of paint!). I pay my respects to the gathering.

Stephen then calls his mother, aunt, and another woman for a private meeting with me. The women sit on what once were the roofing sheets for a demolished cottage. I make a stool from two bricks that once were part of a team that proudly stood shoulder to shoulder, and head to buttock, to make up a wall for a cottage. Stephen performs the introductions, after which everyone eagerly awaits to hear from me. I slowly pull out from my trousers right side pocket, \$500 000.00 of \$20 000.00 notes. I respectfully hand the money to Stephen. The money has been extended to Stephen by GCN towards the provision of food for the mourners. Stephen in turn passes the “solemn” looking notes to his aunt. The aunt purposefully wraps the money in a “self-consciously” clean handkerchief, self-consciously because in its cleanliness, the handkerchief stands in sharp contrast to the immediate surroundings. I think about what to say.

What can one really say to people who have lost so much and in such circumstances? I tell them what I feel strongly. I talk to them about the need to forgive. Indeed, unless the human mind is capable of soaring above aggression, bigotry, anger, hatred, and violence in all their various forms, then ORO will continue to be recycled in society in its various forms.

The Large is in the Small, and the Small is in the Large

In my first year of primary education my school teacher introduced me to the alphabet through teaching me to master first the larger and upper case letters. I was then introduced to the small and lower case forms of the letters. Real progress was measured in terms of the ability to understanding that the small lower case was also in the larger upper case, and conversely that the large upper case letter was also in the small lower case letter. Indeed one is just another form of the other.

Human earthly life is characterised by aggression, unkindness, hatred, injustices, disrespect for the dignity of the human person, violence, in all their obvious and so obvious forms. What differs is the scale and largeness. The challenge to human progress and understanding is to “see” the everyday lack of genuine warmth towards others, insults, anger, hatred, and violence in the periodic bursts of large scale violence, and to “see” the periodic large scale human monstrosity in the everyday individual small scale monstrosity. Within this context, ORO is happening everyday, and unless the everyday individual anger and hatred is completely demolished, then there will always be periodic bursts of large scale OROs. The indignity and violence characterising ORO is the same indignity and violence that was behind the colonisation of Africa by Europe, the genocide in Rwanda, and is behind the conflicts in Sudan, and in the Middle East. To bring about an end to large scale indignities, we must erase the small indignities of our everyday life at workplaces, at home, in the bus, etc.

The greatest tragedy with human life is not in the events such as ORO *per se*. Rather, the greatest tragedy is that the human mind is like a spring in its mediocrity. The mind is stretched out of its slumber by the force of large scale catastrophies. There is a hive of activity and concern. But when the force is removed, the mind recoils back into its

everyday mundane and lethargic existence. The challenge is how to support and maintain the concern even in the absence of the large scale event.

ORO has, of course, posed immediate challenges. There is the urgent need for food, shelter, schooling, etc., for those directly and immediately affected. These needs must be met. The challenge, however, is to integrate into meeting these needs, the absolute necessity to support the process whereby the human mind is able to transcend and soar above the stubborn human situation of aggression, hatred, and violence.

Individuals and organisations that are seriously compelled to assist those immediately affected must go beyond giving mere material assistance. Rather they must also dig deep within and give up also in their everyday life hatred, aggression, being disrespectful, insulting language, etc. All these vices must also be given up. Material assistance on its own devoid of a fundamental change in our everyday behaviour is, with all due respect, fundamentally the same as not giving anything. On the other hand, one who has not given materially but having appreciated the small in the large, resolved to never insult another, treat another without dignity, etc that person has given fundamentally.

But we don't want to look within ourselves. Indeed if we did, we would discover how lonely, insecure, fearful, aggressive, violent, we really are. We cover up for this insecurity in treating others despicably. It is exceedingly easier to give materially than to give up our small insecurities, and aggressive behaviour and to resolve never to treat as mere instruments and tools our spouses, children, workers, street kids, etc. We point fingers as a way to escape responsibility. But when one points a finger, there are three fingers of the same hand pointing at you. If we find it difficult to transcend our own bigotry, disrespect to others, how can we expect and demand another to do so?

The Silent Trauma

At around 4.45pm the same day that Stephen visited GCN, I leave, reluctantly, the warmth of GCN offices a very chilly wind is terrorising people outside. I walk my way to Zengeza 2. From there I board a Machipisa bound commuter mini-bus to begin my two leg commuting trek back home to Budiriro. At an intersection about 100 metres on the road, the mini-bus discreetly stops. An "official" convoy of three vehicles snakes its way into the road. Leading the convoy is a police sedan vehicle daringly flashing its overhead lights. Bringing the tail is a Mazda B2500 police pick-up truck proudly displaying its load of police officers at the back. Sandwiched in between the two vehicles is a low-bed transport carrier. Lazily and indifferently lying on the low bed is a trench digger. I have seen trench diggers before. This one, however, is different. There is something deeply unsettling about and with it. I watch it and it stares daringly back at me. A wave of fear ripples through me momentarily. The mini-bus follows the convoy. A moment later, the convoy reaches its destination, and another "illegal" structure is about to meet its demise.

Word of the impending destruction of the building – a shop that traded mostly in paraffin - must have spread around. A sizeable crowd is gathered to witness the demolition. A few people are frantically trying to empty the building of as many goods and valuables as they can. Others are removing the roofing sheets. The convoy pulls off the road. As the mini-bus speedily carries me away to Machipisa, I carry

with me heavily and uncomfortably a memory of children and adults gathered to watch the demolition of someone's property. Is ORO also proving some sort of free entertainment to communities? After all, a weekly paper triumphantly informs us that ORO has also created employment for youths. For a fee, the youths will come and do the demolition for one. What values are we inculcating in our youths?

In our everyday life, how many people actually spontaneously share in another's success and joy? A handful, if any. If it is hard for us to celebrate genuinely the triumph of our neighbour, how will we empathise truly with their sorrow? Is it any wonder that the demolition of someone's property becomes a source of entertainment? Even when we do lend a hand in putting out the fire gutting the house, the heart does not also participate in the action. Outwardly we help, but inwardly we experience a sense of joy.

The inability to empathise with the suffering of others, and the enjoyment in someone's pain is, however, linked and can be traced backward to an abusive past. To come into the world is to enter into a dysfunctional human situation. The degree, and extent of abuse may differ, but we are all products and victims of a dysfunctional history. Imprinted on the human psyche and played out differently is the recording of lack of genuine warmth towards our fellow human being.

Children are very impressionable when they are very young. When children gather with adults and learn to enjoy in the pain of someone's loss, how can they as they grow up be taught to empathise truly with someone's sorrow? How and who is going to educate them that the joy that they experience is itself a dysfunctional experience?

Humanitarian concern right now is focussed on the traumatic experiences of those children directly affected by ORO. But the real danger for the future lies in those children who watch, at the site or on television, and learn to derive joy from the destruction. These children are silently being abused. They are silently being traumatised. The sense of joy is being silently imprinted onto their psyche. Sixty or seventy years hence, one of these children is going to enact his sadistic joy on a large scale. People will point fingers at him or her. They will blame him or her. Emotions will be running so high. A voice of reason that rightly traces the event to ORO will be drowned out in the emotive voice of blaming the one who once was a child during ORO. In the frantic effort to attend to those affected directly, people will lose sight of those silently enjoying the destruction, hence being silently traumatised. In our total blindness, the traumatic and imprinting cycle is perpetuated.

Indeed, the roots of ORO go down very deep, to the very beginning of human existence. In each one of us is the whole traumatic experience of humanity. But to cut that link requires effort put in the present. It cannot be done yesterday, and it cannot be done tomorrow, but now.

Human Dishonesty

Two days later, on 23rd June 2005, Stephen is back at GCN in Zengeza 4. He informs me that he had visited GCN the previous day but was informed that I was in a meeting. Indeed, the Programs team of GCN met to brief each other on their programs. Anyway, Stephen asked for a vehicle to help transport the body of Robert

for burial at their rural home in Gokwe. I kindly tell Stephen that we could not help him in this area. Stephen was, however, not the only one visiting GCN for help with transport to go to the rural home.

A partner NGO had indicated willingness to assist mostly with the relocating to their rural homes those directly impacted on by ORO. To assist towards this GCN volunteered to collect the necessary details of people in dire need of assistance for passing on to the partner NGO. An official of the NGO and the Director of GCN jointly addressed some of those affected by ORO on 16th June 2005. The official left promising to relay to GCN the nature of assistance the NGO would render after making representation to the Director of the NGO. The phone at GCN did not ring. In the meantime desperate people continued to stream to GCN Zengeza, some to check on the progress, and others to register for assistance. Some people would spend the whole day at GCN in case the partner NGO arrived in their absence and assisted those present. GCN staff had to attend to these people.

On Tuesday, 21st June 2005, the same day that Stephen visited GCN, two officials from the partner NGO visited GCN Zengeza for a further fact-finding mission. We introduced them to Stephen and I impressed on them and they agreed on the dire situation of Stephen. They sat next to Stephen and promised to seriously look into Stephen's case and to contact GCN as a matter of urgency. Stephen was not the only one bereaved by ORO.

A GCN staff took the officials on a visit to another family bereaved by ORO. An "O" level student died when a lentil to the door of a cottage that they were demolishing fell onto him. The officials demonstrated deep concern and reiterated their promise to impress on their superiors the need for immediate response to assist the bereaved families. Indeed, in the afternoon, one of the officials called and informed GCN that they were still looking into the matters and would inform us shortly. That was on 21st June 2005. I am completing this presentation on 27th June 2005. The phone at GCN is loud in its silence. It was as a way of following up on the promise made to him that Stephen re-visited GCN on 23rd June 2005. It was left to me to inform Stephen that no further help was forthcoming to him.

The NGO in question is obviously a "professional" organisation. The officials who visited GCN demonstrated a high level of academic education. The NGO, through the officials could not, however, remain loyal to their promise. A phone call just to explain could have been enough. One can only speculate that the NGO had been repelled by the high political charge surrounding ORO.

But how many of us in our everyday life remain loyal to our promises? Do our words match with our actions? Education has not made honest people out of us. The educated and the uneducated are fundamentally the same. Inwardly we are all insecure, hence dishonest. Indeed education has mostly produced a very clever mind that is astonishingly adept at avoiding and rationalising vital issues of existence. No doubt politicians around the world have perfected the art of dishonesty. Zimbabwean politicians and government officials in particular, it is clear, also lie shamelessly. All this, however, does not exonerate each of us. Politicians in general may lie "big", and Zimbabwean ones also shamelessly, but our small dishonesties are the roots from

which the tree of “big” lies, and the branches of shamelessness shoots. Insecurity is a deep seated disease which no amount of education can wash away.

In all honesty, may I thank GCN staff at Zengeza 4 for being there for those affected by ORO who visited our offices. In a highly political charged atmosphere, we all shared an unsaid fear. We all, however, rose above that fear. To date the fear has proved unfounded. But in Zimbabwe, that is not enough reassurance with regards to the future. We take each day as it comes.

With the exception of Stephen, GCN did not assist in any materially quantifiable way. But maybe we did assist in other and immeasurable ways. On a number of occasions after talking with an “affected” person and kindly apologising for not having been able to assist materially, I received the response that I had on the contrary, given them something – an ear to hear their plight. It is my hope that in our interaction with those who visited us we managed to give them more than hope, but the inspiration to transcend the anger that they obviously and understandable felt.

History will, of course, judge ORO differently. Materially it will be judged by among other indicators whether rising out of the ashes of the “illegal” structures and businesses will be a sound and robust economy. Of profound significance, however, is the moral judgement. Fundamentally, ORO will be judged by history as having being a milestone in human relations only if arising out of the dust of demolished structures is a clear mind that has transcended anger, hatred, and violence. The challenge is whether ORO can symbolise the demolition and destruction of structures of anger, hatred, aggression, violence, etc that are “illegally” occupying human hearts. The “legal” and natural impulse of the human souls is towards freedom and liberation.

Can the sight of household furniture in the open inspire us to surrender our attachments to material possessions? Can this inspire us to deeply reflect on what really matters in life, to deeply ask ourselves the real significance and meaning to life? Truly speaking, nothing belongs to us. Everything that we spend all our life amassing, we leave at death. Even the physical body which we fight for and try to protect at all cost is loaned to us with a return date already stamped on it. When that day comes it does not really matter how we make our exit – the form and nature does not really matter. But we can, even as we live our day to day life, learn to die to our attachment to the transient and impermanent existence.

Can the demolition of buildings and the passing away of Robert symbolise the breaking down of the walls and dying to a “self” that separates and partitions us from our fellow human beings and indeed the whole of creation. Without the partitions, we experience life as at oneness and intricately connected. Maybe the glue that maintains this oneness is LOVE. To bring about love, we must transcend the world situation.

Transcending is, however, vastly more than mere coping and acceptance. Indeed, this seems to be the general attitude of Zimbabweans at the moment – accepting and coping with the hardships of the current unacceptable situation. Mere coping and accepting a condition (say HIV infection or suffering from cancer) or situation (say the socio-political-economic situation of Zimbabwe) is the highest form of submission. Coping with something is to merely adjust oneself to the inevitability of

the situation or condition. One's level of thinking remains at the same level with the situation that is being coped with.

Whereas to transcend something is to soar high above the situation or condition so that it does not touch you. One climbs a mountain and observes the condition or situation from a higher and vantage position. When you transcend a situation it no longer has a hold or control over you. Transcending is the highest form of freedom. Transcending the world situation enables the mind to rise above the mud and impurities of anger, hatred, and violence. Absolutely no one and nothing can touch a mind that is inwardly pure. People can bring your house down, crown you with thorns, spit at you, call you all sort of names, but absolutely no one can get to you psychologically. You are beyond any price. This state of absolute freedom is the underlying impulse of the human soul. The purpose of earthly life is to bring about the experience of this sublime and pure freedom, in oneself, and through oneself, the whole of humanity.

Outwardly, the behaviour is the same, appearing calm. But the mental attitude is different. One is calm because they, like Zimbabweans in general, have accepted the situation and so they are coping – they have submitted to the inevitability of the situation. Whereas another's calmness is a manifestation of a mind that has transcended the situation. The danger, however, with a mind that is merely coping and accepting is that it may react in very unpredictable ways.