

ZOE, Zimbabwe

Local churches supporting orphans in the community and responding to crisis

ZOE (Zimbabwe Orphans through Extended hands) works through the local church, mobilising and training volunteers to care for and support children in their communities who have been orphaned by AIDS. In Zimbabwe, HIV prevalence in adults is over 20%,⁵ and malnutrition, lack of access to antiretrovirals and other medicines are now contributing to a rising death toll. There are currently an estimated 1.1 million orphans, out of a population of 13 million.⁶

Recognising that the scale of the orphan crisis is beyond the scope of individual NGO projects to adequately address, ZOE seeks to mobilise local church congregations across the country to respond to orphans in their own communities.

ZOE envisions church pastors; who take the vision back to their local churches. The focus is on building relationships that provide love and care for the orphans. Some material needs are also met. This approach aims for grassroots mobilisation which means a wide reaching and sustainable response which does not require many external resources. ZOE encourages church leaders and provides training for volunteers and support in sustainable livelihoods for carers. Where there is outstanding need, ZOE will provide some extra financial support, but the aim is that local churches are self-sustaining.

The economic collapse in Zimbabwe means that local churches are now increasingly stretched beyond their capacity. ZOE is responding to the escalating humanitarian crisis by distributing food through its network of local churches. In such a difficult and highly politicised situation, working through the local church is one of the main ways to ensure that the food reaches the most vulnerable people.

Budget (2007): US \$216,000 *not including feeding programme*

Achievements

- 3,800 volunteers are regularly visiting and providing support for 75,000 orphans and vulnerable children in the community.
- 1,200 churches have an active programme for visiting and supporting children orphaned because of AIDS and a further 800 churches are involved in giving out food and providing school fees.
- In 2006, 230 churches requested envisioning and training to better care for orphans.
- 284 families received livelihoods support in 2006 to help them become self-sustaining.
- Crisis response: feeding programme for 36,000 people over six months in 2006 and, due to reduced resources and increasing prices, for 9,500 people for six months in 2007. From December 2007, this will provide for 35,000 people for six months.

5 *Report on the Global AIDS Epidemic*, UNAIDS (2006)

6 UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) Population Division (2006)



Volunteers from local churches provide care for orphans.

Local churches in Zimbabwe are providing care and support for orphans and vulnerable children.



PROGRAMME

Sustainability

ZOE is a small organisation with minimal structure, a small staff team and low financial input. This is intentional as ZOE believes that its role is not to implement projects but to be a catalyst – to mobilise, train and strengthen local churches to respond to the needs of the orphans within their communities. The aim is to ensure local ownership and long-term sustainability by encouraging local churches to take the initiative and raise resources.

From the beginning of the process of church mobilisation, ZOE makes it clear that it will not provide any substantial resources other than training. The local churches are expected to take responsibility for their volunteers and for supporting families. As the work has grown, rather than take on new staff, ZOE has trained some of the volunteer area coordinators (usually the local church leader who initially invited ZOE into the area) so that they can deliver the volunteer training in their local area.

Local response

The focus is on building relationships of love and care for the orphans, rather than providing financial support. Within the context of this relationship, the volunteers and the church will try to meet the needs they see. Wherever possible, the resources come from the local churches themselves although where there is still outstanding need, ZOE will try to help.

Churches raise money from church members to pay the orphan's school fees and provide for their needs, often by having a separate collection basket at the back of church specifically for the orphans in

the community, or by requesting members of the congregation to donate food and clothes. The volunteers are not paid anything and visit in their own time. Church members are encouraged to offer their skills to repair a roof or to prepare land for families who are in need.

In this way, the programme is not reliant on outside inputs, but mobilises the potential of the community to respond to its needs and is therefore sustainable and empowering. Because the volunteers come from within the community – they are generally neighbours – they are best placed to know the actual needs as they arise.

Process: Mobilising the church

ZOE's model for church mobilisation is simple, easy to replicate and can take only three to six months from the church leader's initial request for help, to volunteers visiting orphans.

1 Envisioning workshop for local church leaders

This consists of a one-day workshop offered to all church leaders in a local area after an initial request from a few. The workshop uses Bible studies and participatory training approaches to look at the role and responsibility of the church and the needs of local orphans. Most church leaders are already motivated to care for orphans but feel they cannot because they lack the financial resources. The workshop communicates the message that the first need of orphans is not physical resources such as food or housing, but love, care, support and nurture. These needs do not require financial inputs, but can be met by local, caring

people. This breaks attitudes of dependency and empowers the local community. Pastors return to their churches and share the vision with their congregations, and then draw up a list of volunteers.

2 Volunteer training workshop

The workshop is facilitated by ZOE staff or a volunteer area coordinator, with the venue and logistics organised by the local church. Issues covered include identifying orphans, making visits, keeping records, identifying needs, HIV awareness, and involving existing community structures.

3 Identifying orphans in the local area

The pastor and volunteers draw up a list of orphans in their local area who are most in need of support. The nature of the AIDS pandemic, and the current situation in Zimbabwe, with little access to adequate

nutrition, antiretrovirals (ARVs) or other medicines, mean that when one parent dies the other often follows, or at least is sick or struggling. Many orphans are being cared for by elderly grandparents who may not be able to provide for them. The orphans range from 0–18 and include child-headed households. The families are not limited to those that belong to the church but come from across the community.

The accuracy of this initial list of families is very important. ZOE provides a basic assessment form for recording the families. The headings are:

- Family name:
- Family carer:
- Number of orphans:
- Mother or father or both died:
- Age: 0–1 / 1–5 / 5–18:
- Other relatives helping:

CASE STUDY

Releasing local potential

ZOE mobilises and encourages local people to support orphans in their community by emphasising that the most important resources are human capacity and not only financial input. At ZOE's training workshops, volunteers are encouraged to see how they can contribute:

HEART: to love and care for orphans and families in need.

EYES: to observe needs, to see the soft brown hair and swollen hands and feet that indicate malnutrition, to see the hole in the thatch, lack of pots and pans in the home, to see signs of abuse.

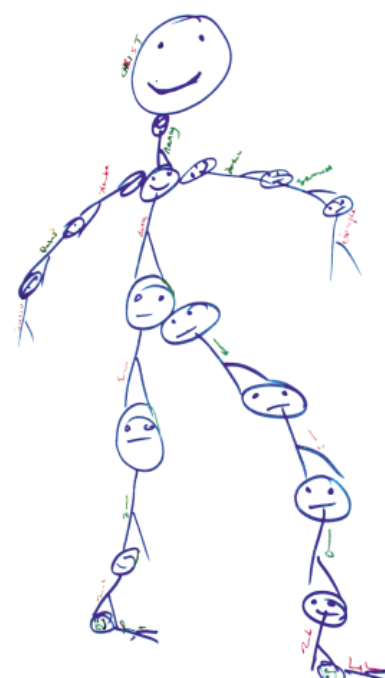
MOUTH: to speak up on behalf of the orphans, to speak out against abuse and protect inheritance rights, to share learning and give advice, to ask people how they are, and to comfort them and pray for them.

EARS: to listen, to give orphans or elderly carers the chance to talk to someone and share their concerns.

HANDS: for providing practical help such as mending thatch, preparing ground for planting, cooking, cleaning, and teaching skills such as sewing or carpentry.

FEET: for taking messages, bringing provision, accompanying children to the clinic, and for playing sport or games with them.

The workshops make sure people understand that although these things cost nothing financially, there is still a price in terms of time and effort, and – particularly for those involved in advocacy – sometimes reputation.



Drawing produced at one of ZOE's volunteer training workshops. The figure represents the church as 'the body of Christ'. The facilitator draws a head and outline body on a flipchart or blackboard and challenges the volunteers to come and draw themselves as the part of the body that they want to be.

Local churches remain in the community for the long term and have a distinctive role in providing sustainable support to children who are orphaned or vulnerable.



It is essential that wherever possible, the extended family takes responsibility for their own orphans, so if relatives are already helping and providing care then the family will probably not be on the list. Volunteers ask the family and check with neighbours to find out the real situation. ZOE recommends that the number of families taken on should be appropriate to the size and resources of the local church, and no more than 30 families initially.

4 Visit programmes implemented by volunteers

Each volunteer should care for no more than five orphan families (fewer if that includes a child-headed household). ZOE recommends that they should live no more than 5km away, to ensure they are able to visit regularly. The volunteers aim to visit each family at least once a month and many visit more frequently. The fact that volunteers continue to visit regularly helps to reassure families of their commitment and care, which is psychologically very beneficial, especially if the household has been abandoned by the extended family.

The relationship is based on care, so is not dependent on financial resources, but the volunteers will also help practically where possible. When they visit, the volunteers seek to identify the needs, look for signs of abuse, listen, help practically, share resources, give advice on nutrition or accessing medical help, and pray with the families.

Volunteers are given a notebook and pen so they can keep simple records of each visit. Each time they note down the family name, the date of the visit, what they observed, what they did, and any needs.

If the volunteer cannot write, there will usually be a child or family member who can.

5 Care for care-givers

Each month local church leaders and volunteers meet to share experiences, learning and problems, and coordinate local responses to needs. The volunteers bring their records to these meetings and report back and share any problems. This helps to ensure local church ownership of the work, and provides a support network for the volunteers. Other people from the community such as teachers and magistrates also attend and help to address any problems.

Developing local capacity

ZOE provides on-going training to equip volunteers to care for orphans and to encourage and strengthen local church responses. Training covers:

- **HIV** – basic facts about the virus, methods of transmission, how to address stigma, positive living, prevention of mother-to-child transmission and practical care such as planning a nutritional diet for someone living with HIV.
- **ABUSE** – aspects of physical, mental and verbal abuse, how to recognise it and how to effectively help the children to safety.
- **ADVOCACY** – speaking up to prevent abuse, and to defend the inheritance rights of orphans.
- **PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT AND COUNSELLING** – counselling children and helping family carers to cope with bereavement and the issues they face.

'We need to strengthen the church in the short term, so that it can do the work in the long term.'

Pastor Promise Manceda

■ **FAMILY STRENGTHENING WORKSHOPS** – covering issues such as parenthood, baby care and the importance of play.

■ **'TRAINING OF TRAINERS'** workshops for volunteer area coordinators, who go on to facilitate envisioning workshops and train volunteers. ZOE's work has been so successful that there is now high demand from other local church leaders for training. Rather than take on new staff, ZOE trains selected volunteers to meet these needs.

Sustainable livelihoods

To enable orphan families to become self-sustaining, ZOE is investing in livelihood support. This includes training in conservation farming methods in rural areas, and providing funding for 227 orphans in urban areas to attend college courses.

ZOE also encourages micro-enterprise. Sixty orphan families have been trained in soap making, candle making and basic business management. Thirteen coordinators have received training in small business management so that they can now train families in their area in basic money management and marketing skills. ZOE has also distributed 251 goats and 2,500 chickens to selected families in 36 areas, and trained them in care of livestock.

Advocacy

Local churches are an integral part of the community and therefore are well placed to know the real needs on the ground and to speak up on behalf of the vulnerable. ZOE trains church leaders and volunteers to recognise and respond to orphans who are suffering abuse, and to raise awareness in the community about child rights. Volunteers are trained to check the physical condition of the children when they visit. Often children are too frightened to tell anyone, and those close to them may be either the perpetrators of the abuse, or dependent on the perpetrators, so the abuse continues. The church volunteer who visits regularly may therefore be the only one who is close enough to observe the effects of the abuse, and free enough to speak out on

behalf of the child. Local church leaders, who have a position of respect and authority in the community, are able to intercede, to ensure the child receives medical attention, is placed with alternative carers, and to take legal action where necessary.

Birth certificates are needed to register children for school and for taking exams. When their parents die, and children go to stay with relatives, these documents are often lost. One church leader regularly goes into schools as a representative for these children, and persuades the schools to enrol them temporarily. He then works with the relatives to access birth records and replacement certificates from the local registry office.

Another problem is inheritance rights for property. The person who holds the parent's death certificates can take ownership of their property, and many children who have been orphaned because of AIDS are left vulnerable to property theft by relatives. One church leader is currently looking after these documents for a child-headed household in his community, to prevent relatives taking away their home.

CASE STUDY

Child protection

A member of one local church alerted the pastor to a thirteen-year old girl who was being abused by her uncle, who was her care-giver. The family was reluctant to act, because it could damage the family's reputation, and their neighbours were too afraid to help against the family's wishes, but the church was able to speak out. The pastor took the girl to the doctor, and pursued the case, and the perpetrator was arrested. The family bribed the police to change the charges but the pastor, who had received training in advocacy, was able to lodge a complaint, and, supported by ZOE, took the case to court. He is now helping to look after the girl.



Esinah signing for her food distribution.

CASE STUDY

Saving lives

Esinah Ndlovu is a widow caring for eight grandchildren. The oldest is 14 years old and the youngest just learning to walk. They harvested nothing this year, and as the economy collapses, the food distributions organised and administered by volunteers from the local church have become essential. Esinah says, 'There have been many deaths and people are starving, without this food we would probably be dead by now. Only God knows what will happen.'

CHALLENGES

Responding to crisis

ZOE's programme of church mobilisation has been very successful. However, Zimbabwe is a country in crisis. Malnutrition and lack of medicines are contributing to a rising death toll, and increasing numbers of children orphaned. Economic collapse means that people cannot afford basic commodities or school fees. Increasing national tension and 80% unemployment contribute to rising crime rates. Orphans are particularly vulnerable to abuse and property theft by relatives. Bad harvests and the escalating economic crisis now mean that many are facing starvation.

ZOE's aim is that local churches are self-reliant and able to provide sustainable care for the orphans in their community. However, increasing external resources are now required. The level of need and the number of orphans is so overwhelming that local churches are now struggling to offer the most basic care through their own contributions. The escalating crisis in Zimbabwe has meant that ZOE has had to begin food distributions. This is the reality of working in an unstable environment; ZOE has found itself increasingly responding to crisis rather than facilitating the long-term development that is its primary aim.

Food distribution

The need for food distributions is increasingly urgent in both urban and rural areas. This was not part of ZOE's original plan, but has increasingly dominated their work. The majority of beneficiaries are extremely vulnerable as they are too young, and their guardians too old or weak, to produce food or work for money, and so cannot sustain their livelihoods without external help. Bad harvests, closure of informal markets in urban areas, and the economic collapse make it increasingly difficult to survive as traditional coping mechanisms are breaking down. Many people feel that they would be facing starvation without these food distributions.

The benefits of food distribution are shared by communities through the informal social networks that often support communities in times of crisis. Without food distributions, many orphans were surviving on donations and handouts from relatives, volunteers and other community members. The food distribution means that these people no longer have to share their limited food supplies, and the orphans are ensured good nutrition.

Food distributions also keep orphaned families together, as in times of food shortages siblings are often split between different households, or elder children are forced to leave home to find casual work in neighbouring countries to support their younger siblings. This inevitably has a negative psychological impact on children who have already experienced the loss of their parents.

Food distribution increases the demand on coordinators' and volunteers' time but it is appreciated because it enables them to address

GOOD PRACTICE

HAP-I⁷ beneficiary accountability

Seeking to improve its monitoring and evaluation processes, ZOE has been implementing a pilot programme of beneficiary accountability according to HAP-I standards into its feeding programme activities. The one-year pilot has focused on three distribution sites. Before distributions, communities are informed through posters and community meetings about:

- criteria for selection of beneficiaries
- ration quantities allocated for each beneficiary
- timescale for distributions.

Beneficiaries involved in this pilot were empowered to decide on distribution sites and manage the food distribution themselves. There was also a 'suggestion box' provided at each distribution site for feedback. This was widely welcomed and used by communities. Community members reported that where they could not write down the feedback themselves, this was not a problem as they could find someone who could write their complaints for them.

Results so far have been positive and the pilot has since been extended to other sites and to cover issues beyond simply food distributions. Communities involved have valued the opportunity to take control of their own distributions, and to have a mechanism for feeding back complaints. This program has helped to address concerns and ensure that pastors are not using food distributions to encourage church attendance. It has improved the self-esteem of beneficiaries who no longer feel helpless and dependant, but are now actively involved in the decisions and distribution of the food. One child who is the head of her household reported that 'It feels like they respect us now that they let us handle the food.'



The local church in Zimbabwe is providing hope in the midst of crisis.

the children's most urgent needs. Volunteers report that providing food strengthens relationships as it gives the children confidence that the volunteers really care about their welfare. However, as the crisis deepens, the volunteers themselves are increasingly strained, and are themselves in need of food.

As there are now many restrictions on NGOs operating in Zimbabwe and food distribution is intensely politicised, working with the local church is one of the main ways to ensure that support reaches vulnerable and marginalised people.

Monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation of the care for orphans has been difficult, as ZOE relies on reports from local coordinators. Coordinators are often church leaders who have many other commitments. Responsibility for monitoring and evaluation should be delegated to a volunteer who is good at record keeping and follow-up. Transport problems because of fuel shortages mean that it is increasingly difficult to collect data from rural areas. ZOE has now appointed a member of staff to support and strengthen monitoring and evaluation of the programmes.

7 Humanitarian Accountability Project – International

'The church is the key agency for care, counselling, advocacy, in response to HIV. Support groups within the church can provide emotional, practical and spiritual care for people living with or affected by HIV, and for care givers.'

Jean Webster, founder of ZOE

KEY LEARNING

Mobilising the church

ZOE's work with orphans has led many local churches to recognise and accept the importance of responding to HIV, and to realise that even with limited resources they can make a difference in their communities. Seeing the vision carried out successfully at the local level has encouraged other local churches, who were initially reluctant, to get involved.

Local response

ZOE mobilises local churches to respond to the needs of orphans and vulnerable children within their communities. Because the church volunteers are local, they know the needs, are trusted, and can visit regularly. However, it also means they are affected by the same problems. As the situation in Zimbabwe becomes more difficult, local churches are no longer able to support the work and ZOE has had to increase its financial help and begin food distributions.

Changing attitudes

Where children cannot stay with relatives, either because there are none, or because there is abuse, some are being taken in by volunteers and coordinators. This is done after much discussion with neighbours and local leadership. It is unusual, as it

has been a taboo in many areas to adopt someone who is not a family relation, and demonstrates how the local church is helping to transform attitudes.

Advocacy

The worsening situation in Zimbabwe has meant an increased emphasis on local lobbying and advocacy around birth certificates, need for ARVs, inheritance laws, school attendance, abuse. In cases of abuse, the children are often too frightened to tell anyone, and those close to them are often either the perpetrators, or dependent on the perpetrators, so the abuse continues. The church volunteer who visits regularly is often therefore the only one who is close enough to observe the effects of the abuse and free enough to advocate on behalf of the child.

Contact details

ZOE
c/o Southern Africa Team, Tearfund
100 Church Road, Teddington, TW11 8QE, UK
Email: enquiry@tearfund.org

