

KGVI- Update Report June 2020

How about a feel good start to this newsletter. This was a book produced by Farai and some teachers under a UNICEF programme. Copy the link and enjoy!

<https://zw.goodinternet.org/sections/education/storybooks/baba-and-me/>

Fourteen weeks after shut down and we are still not certain what the situation is in Zimbabwe with COVID 19 infections. Our stated numbers are relatively low but what is having a worst impact on people is the economic effects of the lockdown.

Initial visits to KGVI children is revealing hunger and medical complications because of lack of supplies. Added to this in Bulawayo is lack of water and now diseases caused by contaminated water supplies. We have recently had confirmation that the outbreak of diarrhoea in Bulawayo is in fact typhoid. In fact we have recorded more deaths due to this than to the virus! However our latest news is that nearly 200 of the student nurses from our two main hospitals have had to be quarantined while the qualified nurses have gone on strike because of poor pay and no protective gear!

When water is only available two nights per week and in some areas only from communal boreholes people will be tempted to collect water wherever they can, which so often means broken pipes polluted with sewage and other dirt. This means that we will need to find water purifying sachets to add to the food parcels. Children weakened by hunger can so easily succumb to diarrhoea and dehydration.

Throughout the lockdown KGVI has continued to operate to the best of its ability. For those staff living at KGVI it has been work as usual while those living off the premises continue to come in and stay for a week at a time. Most of the admin and therapy staff are busy sourcing food and delivering to our most needy children. We are so grateful to everyone who responded so generously to enable us to take care of these children. So far the therapy staff have visited 99 children and have identified another 23 who will need our help over the next couple of months and possibly even longer. We just don't know how long our lockdown will continue. We also don't know how many other children may be in need but we will keep checking whenever we can.

One good thing to report is that most families seem to be supporting our children to the best of their ability. We did not find any cases of deliberate abuse but more situational problems. In far too many visits they found whole families staying in one room with no possibility of social distancing. There is still an element of neighbours helping out where they can, but when you have nothing there is nothing to share! One thing for sure was the KGVI food parcels are life savers and everyone has been so very grateful.

Meantime back at KGVI we are doing our best to build up our productivity in order to become as self-sufficient as possible. Again thanks to anyone who has helped with this. The goal on our total giving site was \$20,000 for 2020 but this was set up just as COVID overtook the world so our optimistic goal will have to be reduced to 2,000 – perhaps we could make it \$2020 for 2020! It is wonderful to see how our gardens are coming to life, there are vegetables everywhere and whatever we produce is always in great demand – our popular tomatoes were followed by delicious beetroot! Our crop of sugar beans are slowly drying and should be ready for harvesting in two weeks time. We are already planning our next crop of tomatoes and thanks to the generosity of one of our long-time supporters we have been able to buy another Nethouse which will ensure even

more vegetables for consumption, for sale and for preservation. In addition we are moving on our small livestock project and now have 100 Sasso chicks growing rapidly. This new breed of chickens, originating in France, are supposed to be hardier and require less fancy feeding. In fact these lucky birds will be foraging in a part of the original gardens which we will leave fallow as we bring in new land. It's an exciting development for us which keeps us both busy and enthusiastic. We have plans for more chickens, some rabbits and even possibly turkeys as they make good security guards!

In the meantime we have had to look at ways to help Luckmore who has been such a stalwart in the garden. He was working so hard that he hurt his back, something that was inevitable considering his disability. Now he has to take it easy but Luckmore being Luckmore still wants to be productive. We are hoping to raise some funds to set up raised 'wicking' beds for him which he will be able to manage without bending and lifting (photo below of our present wicking bed). These beds will be excellent for root crops which don't do so well in the other gardens so if all goes well Luckmore will be our carrot and beetroot producer!

In the KGVI offices everyone has kept very busy not only with the rescue packages but also with a project that Precious has initiated with her contacts from the States. She is bringing in our teachers of the deaf to record and post lessons on the WhatsApp platform. The lessons will not only prepare the children for their end of year exams but will also keep them informed about the COVID virus. There have been a few radio lessons organised for school children but of course these are no good for our deaf learners. For some of our deaf children this will be the first real communication they have had since schools closed way back in March!

What a challenging time this has been for our new KGVI Management! They have had to hit the ground running and this is just what they have done. All of them are very actively involved in some aspect of the 'new' KGVI. Loma has picked up the overall admin reins while Innocent's first job as our accountant has been to oversee the audit of our accounts. This is proving to be an almost impossible hurdle as how can anyone audit accounts for the chaos that is our financial situation in Zimbabwe – what currency do you use? What rate do you use? Right now we have two sets of audited accounts, one in USD and one in ZWL with very little correlation between the two because of the ever changing rates of exchange throughout 2019 (bearing in mind this is even more chaotic this year!)

In this changing world we have had to look at new ways to survive and although our production department is unlikely to sustain KGVI it is certainly better than just sitting back and waiting for aid. We are so very grateful to everyone who has helped us with extra support at this most difficult time in our long history of difficult times. This help is so much more appreciated knowing that you all are going through your own troubles. Please take care and keep safe. Our hearts are warmed by the love you have shown our children.

If you are interested in the situation in Zimbabwe I have included a litany of our woes below the children's reports and the photos.

Children's Reports:

Christine Manyande- an intelligent young girl with a strong character and a big heart. She has seen a lot that could have been enough for her to lose hope for the future but instead she still rises above her challenges and shines brighter every day. Her mother has only been to KGVI once when she first brought her. Since then she has been in South Africa, who knows maybe that was of dumping her child as she might have seen her as a burden. She takes very little interest in her child despite the

fact that we are constantly in communication with her hoping that one day she will realise her motherly role in the life of her child.

One day we found Christine was in tears asking one of our house parents if her mother really cares about her. When schools close it has always been a challenge sending her home, since no one wants her and her mother is nowhere to be found. She has been passed from one relative to another, as they keep tossing her around like luggage. One holiday she was taken to her biological sister's home who openly told her that she cannot live with her, she already has her own responsibilities. I was expecting Christine to cry but she never said a word. We had to go back to King George and look for alternative accommodation for her and someone else to take care of her for the holidays.

Over the lockdown she is in the rural areas with her Aunt and five other relatives occupying two huts which are the only habitations in the homestead. We recently were able to purchase groceries which were delivered to Christine's current home. The groceries were met with such relief and one of the aunt's youngest children uttered a touching statement "*At least tonight we will not sleep on an empty stomach*". Though not much for a family of seven but we are assured that at least for the few coming weeks she will have something to eat.

Christine at home welcoming her parcels



Ntombifuthi Ndlovu – is a one of our more talented and intelligent girls. She excelled in her grade 7 studies and is finding her way as a form one student.

Of concern is that both of her parents are now getting old and barely making it from day to day. They live in their older child's house who is currently in South Africa hardly making it as she is not permanently employed but survives on temporary contracts. With this pandemic, South Africa is one of the African countries which was hit hard and has high cases of Covid 19. Back home her mother tries to make a living selling vegetables and the father sells firewood, the income is barely enough to support the family. With the government shutdown of the informal sector even their meagre income has been threatened. Ntombi has been visited and provided with one of our food packages which was received with great relief.

Ntombi receives her food parcel



Mthembe Mkhandla is a young, vibrant and outgoing boy currently in Grade 6. His mother passed on when he was very young. Mthembe is HIV positive and is on chronic medication. He stays with his paternal grandmother, his father and step-mother. Mthembe's father is sometimes hired to do small building projects in their community, earning a pittance to support the family. Currently no one is interested in any building as all they want is to safeguard the little money and food they have to keep their families alive. So sad for poor Mthembe and his family who are barely making it day in and day out.

Mthembe's family is one of the most highly financially deprived families in their home area. On our first visit last year we found the home in a pitiful state. There was and still is a make shift toilet and bathroom, buildings in the homestead were not in mint condition despite the father's trade and no sign of any form of livestock to supplement the family's protein. The family situation was made worse by the COVID 19 pandemic lockdown. The KGVI food packages were received with great joy. The grandmother had been out trying to find some food for the family and was overjoyed when she returned to find what KGVI had been able to deliver – *like the answer to a prayer!*

Mthembe with his little sister receive their food packet



Rosemary Mareverwa

Born into a family of four girls and a boy, Rosemary was a surprise baby and what a surprise she was. She was born with phocomelia missing upper limbs and some parts of her lower limbs. As KGVI we

remember the first day when Rosemary came to KGVI with her mother at age 3 months after being referred from an orthopaedic centre to be assisted at KGVI. Her mother had little understanding of her child's condition and there were problems at home regarding little Rosie. Sometime after, Rosemary's father deserted his family as he could not come to terms with her disability and her mother who was unemployed at the time was left to fend for the family.

We immediately tried to intervene by trying to salvage her lower limbs in the hope that she would walk one day but we had no luck in that area as too many parts were missing from her little feet. A lifelong relationship has since developed and has seen Rosemary being part of our Outreach programme and then enrolment in the EDC A class at King George VI School.

Currently given the limitation phocomelia poses, little Rosie has managed to attain most of her milestones except for walking and she compensates for that by bottom shuffling. A visit was paid to her home recently as a means of following up on our learners and twice we found her mother absent. We found her in the care of an uncle who is very sick with TB. The TB is so severe that the uncle has a severe cough and a septic skin condition and we were concerned that the child is at risk of contracting the disease. This uncle is the one who helps Rosemary with everything including toileting regardless of the fact that he is so sick that he needs someone to look after him.

Rosemary with her groceries



Gladmore Marunga - an outreach patient with muscular dystrophy. The child is staying with both parents and other siblings but the mother is more involved with the child's welfare than the father. The father still has issues accepting the child's condition and has distanced himself from his welfare. When we were doing our assessments during lockdown we discovered that the child's mother has developed a psychiatric condition and the onset was last year in December. No medical intervention was done but the condition and the outbursts are so intense that the child is at risk of injury. The outreach team has witnessed this behaviour on three occasions when she didn't know where she was or who she was, she would also jump saying that someone is hitting her. The team feels that in order to ensure that Gladmore is safe, we need to help his mother get treatment. This is very important because Gladmore's mother is his main caregiver and is the mainstay that holds his support system together. If his mother becomes a full psychiatric patient the child's prognosis is very poor indeed and his life will be at risk.

Gladmore with his food packets



Melody Nyoni

Melody is the oldest in a family of three and she is 20 years old. She is one of our Outreach clients. Melody has severe cerebral palsy and relies on her mother and siblings for most of her activities of daily living. She has never been to school and has received therapy through our outreach program. Her mother is self-employed and her father was working at a clothing shop. The income does not always fully cover the needs of the family. In the past there have been reports of her falling seriously ill without any known diagnosis and she has always recovered. On our recent visit we found her very ill, and she had regressed to the point that she couldn't eat and sit. She had not received any medical assistance as the parents had no money for the medical examinations needed. The KGV team was very moved by the girl's situation and on top of the food parcels immediately stepped in to help, arranging for her to be taken to the local mental-care hospital where the doctor recommended an EEG, this was done and it was established that she suffers from generalised seizures which have greatly affected her overall wellbeing. She is currently in a very critical condition and her mother who has been taking care of her has been hard hit and this has now affected her own health.

Sadly I have to report that this poor girl has just passed away.

Other Photos (below) plus update on Zimbabwe below that

Paida models an experimental mask she made to enable lip reading for the Deaf



Luckmore tending seed onions in our experimental wicking bed



Our new 'babies' – Sasso chicks



Update on situation in Zimbabwe – 30 June 2020

Here we are 13 weeks after shut down and we are still not certain what the situation is in Zimbabwe with COVID 19 infections. Our stated numbers are relatively low but what is having a worst impact on people is the economic effects of the lockdown. We heard last week that 29 staff were sent away from Mpilo Hospital in Bulawayo after an infection scare. They are now in quarantine and we have not heard of any infections coming from them. Despite the fact that testing only happens in Harare our medical staff do seem to know what to do and will react quickly when necessary. As far as we know funds were never enough to prepare the only infectious diseases hospital in Bulawayo so thank goodness we seem to be controlling infections - somehow! Despite the fact that wearing of masks was made mandatory most people are not bothering or simply wearing these around their necks. Social distancing is impossible when you have to spend so much of your time fighting for your place in queues. Lock down has been slightly eased but govt is keeping the so desperate informal sector shut away and these are the people the police will pounce on if they feel so disposed!

Added to the COVID problems, in Bulawayo, is a lack of water and now diseases caused by contaminated water supplies. We are praying that the current outbreak of diarrhoea in Bulawayo is just that and not typhoid or cholera. In fact we have recorded more deaths due to this than to the virus! When water is only available two nights per week and in some areas only from communal boreholes people will be tempted to collect water wherever they can, which so often means broken pipes polluted with sewage and other dirt. Children weakened by hunger can so easily succumb to diarrhoea and dehydration, which is what is happening. Bulawayo City Council tried to get the government to declare Bulawayo a state of emergency but instead they hired a consultant who gave a report to say the situation was not so bad and they should continue to pump until all the supply dams were empty as there **might** be good rains this season! So once again Bulawayo's water problem is not solved while the situation just deteriorates with the risk of even more infections on top of the threat of COVID.

The money situation also does not improve. The Reserve Bank is determined to put an end to the thriving black market and are concentrating all their resources on trying to control this instead of looking at ways to fix a broken economy. As a result of this war between the Reserve Bank and the informal money vendors people are thwarted whichever they turn to try and get money. Long queues at the bank result in a tiny bit of ZWL being handed out, but only if it is available which it generally isn't. Now there is a shortage of USD as well and phone payments are confused by the battle of the banks.

So how are people making purchases? Sadly they mostly aren't and many people are now in desperate circumstances. Where they can they go back to rural homes in the hope that there may be some residual crops left over from what was a very poor season. Those in town usually depend on vending but with the informal sector still under lockdown even this trickle is not coming in.

Fuel which has been in short supply for a couple of years now seems to be in even shorter supply. The queues at garages now stretch around whole blocks and can be up to three vehicles deep. Some people just abandon their vehicles outside a garage in the hope that at some time fuel will arrive and they will be front of the queue.

To add to all this, suddenly on Tuesday the police and army were out stopping people getting into Bulawayo and to a lesser extent Harare. They also moved into the centre of town and chased away all the people who were waiting in desperation in long bank queues. Two days later we still don't know what this is about. Is it medical or political? Rumours abound including the possibility that

Bulawayo is being punished for not praying and fasting when the President announced a day of prayer for Monday. Well the fasting definitely happened! Or is it because civil servants have been told they are to get a cut in pay. No one knows or is told!

There is still food in the shops but at ever-rising costs. A basket of absolute basic staples for a family for a week can cost up to USD 29 (this would be ZWL 725 at bank rate and ZWL 2,030 at black-market rate). As very few people currently have any income let alone USD this is impossible. Add to this the weekly and even daily rise of prices and the fact that we still don't have a ZWL note higher than ZWL10, making any purchases is virtually impossible unless you have the magic USD!

Schools have remained closed since school holidays ended at the beginning of May. There have been many discussions about what to do to get children back to school. The government is keen for them to return but teachers and their unions are saying there is no capability or protection in schools for either children or staff. When you can have up to 70 children in one classroom, how can there be? The latest recommendation is that schools should re-open from the end of July when our winter will basically be over. However schools and unions are asking for PPEs, water supplies, more teachers, more furniture etc etc to enable schools to protect staff and learners. There is no money for any of this so it will not happen so the ideas are simply tossed around with no solutions forthcoming. There was even a message from the Minister of Education advising schools to find ways of making their own incomes – but this does not include charging fees as schools have been advised not to increase or even force parents to pay fees for this coming term!

This is a litany of endless problems, many of which Zimbabwe has faced so often before. Very little solutions are forthcoming and in the meantime Zimbabweans are starving and suffering, along with so many other countries around the world. There are no solutions and we can only hope and pray that the resilience of Zimbabweans will help them through.