" We will bury ourselves"

A Study of Child-Headed Households on Commercial Farms in Zimbabwe

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CONTENTS

Acknowledgements and preamble

This modest study was primarily intended to inform the development of a programmatic response to the needs of child headed households in commercial farm worker communities. It was not the intention to undertake a full-scale research project, but to adopt an "action research" approach. Therefore, no literature review is presented with this report and the approach used has drawn considerably from the extensive experience and knowledge already acquired by FOST as an organisation.

The decision to "publish" this report was made because it was felt that it does contain information of value to other programmes working with orphans and vulnerable children and can contribute to the on-going debate with the country and region about how to address their needs.

Since undertaking this study FOST has begun to respond to the needs of the individual child headed households we included in the research. School fees have been secured from various sources for the children who have been forced to drop out of school and other material items such as clothing, blankets and food have been sourced. On-going follow-up visits and community awareness raising activities are being carried out to all households to ensure that these households, at least, have the support and care that they need for a positive future.

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Sam and Penesera

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Farm Orphan Support Trust of Zimbabwe (FOST) undertook this study into child headed households on commercial farms in April/May 2002 with the aim of identifying their problems and needs and planning potential interventions.

The unique nature of **farm worker communities** makes them particularly vulnerable to the effects of HIV/AIDS. In particular, the lack of traditional safety nets within these communities increases the vulnerability of children, especially orphaned children.

The **methodology** employed for the study was action research oriented and involved interviewing 17 child headed households in Mashonaland Central and Manicaland provinces. Half of a day was spent with each household and a further half day was spent talking to members of the farm community. In total 47 children and 27 community members were interviewed.

The **findings** of the study reveal that child headed households on commercial farms face a number of problems including:

- Food insecurity
- Problem of access to education and skills training
- The struggle to meet material needs
- The absence of psycho-social support
- Poor life skills and knowledge
- Abuse and exploitation
- No extended family network
- Poor housing conditions and lack of tenure security
- Poor access to health care

These are common problems to most orphaned and vulnerable children but it was found that child headed households are especially vulnerable because of the lack of the usual community **"safety nets**".

The report makes a number of **recommendations** regarding interventions. It is suggests that psycho-social support (PSS) interventions should be integrated with the meeting of material needs. All stakeholder groups in farm communities need to be involved in the delivery of PSS, especially the youth and the children themselves. Ways to meet material needs are suggested including external funding and utilisation of existing systems such as BEAM. Advocacy and awareness raising are needed to ensure that child headed households are cared for, protected and included in national development agendas.

It is concluded that future interventions to respond to the needs of child headed households will need to balance material and psycho-social aspects in order to avoid undermining existing coping mechanisms. Supporting community-based responses will involve long-term capacity building and training and require thorough support and follow-up.

Child Headed Households in Commercial Farm Communities

"We feel sad, we miss our parents"
Washington, aged 15

1. Introduction

Farm Orphan Support Trust of Zimbabwe (FOST) is a local non-governmental organisation (NGO), established in 1997 and registered with the Government of Zimbabwe (PVO 3/97). FOSTs programmes are aimed at proactively increasing the capacity of communities on commercial farms in Zimbabwe to respond to the orphan crisis.

Over the past few years FOST has become aware that child headed households (child headed household) are a small but increasing phenomena on commercial farms and that these households are especially vulnerable due to the unique nature of farm worker communities. This vulnerability is linked to the fact that housing on commercial farms is often tied to a job and that orphaned children do not necessarily have the right to remain in the 'home" after the parent has passed away. The fact that many farmers have been prepared to allow child headed household to remain on the farm has been encouraging, but FOST felt that it was necessary to understand more about these families, their problems and coping strategies and analyse how the organisation can most appropriately help and support these children.

This small study is a result of this wish to understand more fully the circumstances of child headed households and the hope that effective interventions can be developed to support these most vulnerable of children.

2. Background information on Farm Worker Communities in Zimbabwe

Farm worker communities comprise some of the most isolated groups of people in Zimbabwe, marginalised from the development goals of the country as a whole. The communities are very different in nature to traditional rural communities, and in many respects have more in common with urban groups.

The main attributes of farm worker communities that influence the impact of HIV/AIDS are:

- Lack of "community": The term "community" rarely applies to farm workers. "Communities" are cohesive groups, which have a common history and social background, a sense of belonging and commitment to each other, and systems for decision-making, planning and initiating projects. These

characteristics are largely absent within the groups that live and work on commercial farms and estates.

- Isolation: Farm worker communities are often cut off from other communities by the large distances involved and by their lack of access to information.
- High mobility: Farm worker communities are characterised by very high levels of mobility. There is seldom a sense of permanency or belonging.
- Because of their high mobility, extended family structures have broken down. The work force of farms comprises people from many different ethic backgrounds, originating from Mozambique, Zambia, Malawi, as well as from various parts of Zimbabwe. One estimate suggested that 30% of farm workers in Zimbabwe have family roots in neighbouring countries. Many farm workers are the second, third or even fourth generation immigrants and links with their families and places of origin are very tenuous or non-existent.
- Although most farm workers and their families should qualify for Zimbabwean citizenship by virtue of their birth and/or long residence in the country, most still do not possess birth certificates and personal identification documents because the regulations are so stringent and their application so strict. Data collected by FOST shows that 74% of all orphans on farms and estates do not possess a birth certificate. A child that does not possess a birth certificate will find it difficult to progress with their education beyond primary level, will not be able to obtain assistance from Social Welfare or claim the benefits they are entitled to from NSSA. In addition, they have no chance of obtaining personal identification papers as adults, perpetuating this vicious circle.
- Instability of family groups is greatly exacerbated by the extent of seasonal and casual labour on farms. Increasing numbers of single women with children are being employed in this way and their lack of work security and inferior status in the community frequently leads them into casual relationships with a permanent worker in the hope of marriage. They, hence, become vulnerable to STI/HIV infection.
- Early marriages are a common feature of farm life leading to "child mothers". Girls often express the feeling that marriage at an early age is the only way to escape the neglect and drudgery of family life but would prefer to continue with their education given a chance.
- The level of social organisation, motivation and involvement of farm workers in issues related to their own social development is low. Although many farms recognise the need to provide basic housing, sanitation and social welfare for their employees and their families, most developments have tended to be farmer led with little overall involvement of farm workers in the development process and little encouragement for farm workers to respond to their own development agendas.
- Poor recreation facilities often means that the beer hall is the hub of social activities in the farm village and during their non-working hours many parents can be found there with their children who are, consequently, subjected to all of the negative influences which prevail in that environment.
- Commercial farm worker communities are often completely disenfranchised from the mainstream political processes. The land redistribution process has generally failed to consider the needs of communities which may be displaced and, to date, only a token effort has been made to include farm workers in the resettlement process.
- Access to health care in commercial farming areas is, on the whole, very poor. Although some Rural District Councils (RDCs) do provide a mobile clinic service, in general antenatal and postnatal care is poor and there is a lack of adequate family planning services. In the current environment these inadequate services are breaking down further and access to health care is becoming even more difficult for farm workers and their children.
- Since Independence in 1980, Zimbabwe has prided itself on expanding access to primary and secondary education. This expansion of educational access was, however, mainly concentrated in communal areas of the country and the commercial farming areas do not feel the benefit to any real

extent. In 1998 it was found that 75% of children in rural areas of Zimbabwe of primary age, were attending school. This figure rose to 85% in urban areas but was only 65% in commercial farming areas. Generally the girl child is less likely to complete their education.

3. Methodology

A child headed household (child headed household) is defined as a family unit of which the oldest person residing in the household is under the age of eighteen.

The "research" undertaken for this report involved the identification of 17 child headed households living on commercial farms in the provinces of Mashonaland Central and Manicaland, Zimbabwe. The households were selected from the FOST database which was updated in January 2002 and from information from the farm communities themselves. The selection of the child headed households to be included in the study was made from farms which were accessible and secure[1]. The selection was, therefore, not scientifically done but an attempt was made to survey children from farms where FOST has not previously had contact as well as those with existing FOST interventions. It was felt, therefore, that the information collected was relevant and meaningful for the purposes of the survey.

Five of the households surveyed were in Manicaland (Chipinge 2, Mutasa 2, Makoni 1) and twelve are in Mashonaland Central (Bindura 3, Mazowe 6, Glendale 2, Shamva 1) This proportion is a reflection of the general distribution of the FOST programme activities and field staff.

The study involved the FOST field staff spending approximately half a day with the children. They prepared a meal together and an "interview" took place using semi-structured questionnaires. Two of the interviews were recorded on tape. Members of the farm communities in which these children live were also interviewed.

The interviews took place during the period 7th April – 7th May 2002 and were undertaken by a team of two people comprising at least one member of FOSTs field staff with two assistants being incorporated to facilitate the recording of the interviews. The interview schedules were prepared by the FOST team as a whole in a one-day training session on 5th April 2002. The analysis and compilation of the report was undertaken by the FOST Director in conjunction with the researchers.

4. Objectives

The objectives of this survey were to:

1. Gain an insight into the lives of children living in child headed households on commercial farms
2. Identify the actual and perceived needs of child headed households from the perspectives of all stakeholders
3. Find out what support mechanisms are already in place and identify the gaps
4. Explore ways of filling the gaps in a realistic and sustainable way
5. Discover how best to create an enabling environment for child headed households.
6. Explore how FOST can best facilitate this environment

[1] The research was undertaken during the post election period and many farms were still experiencing tensions

The final purpose of the study was to enable FOST to develop a suitable programme strategy to address the needs of child headed households in commercial farm communities in Zimbabwe and develop a proposal for a project to implement the programme.

5. Details of the interviewees

The survey took place with seventeen families from sixteen farms. Sixteen of these families were child headed in the strict definition of the term "child"[2], the other was headed by a young person aged 20years. A total of 46 children and the one young person were interviewed, comprising 17 girls and 30 boys. The average age of the children surveyed was 12.9 years (with a range from 20 years to 18 months). Six of the households in the survey are headed by a girl child and 11 by a boy child. The youngest head of household interviewed was a 12-year-old boy.

Twenty-seven members of the farm communities in which these families live were also interviewed, ten of who are Farm Health Workers (FHWs), eleven are general members of the community[3] and four are teachers. In addition two farmers were interviewed[4].

6. Summary of the findings: The Children

6.1 DECEASED PARENTS

All but one family had lost both parents. One family still had a living parent but the parents had separated in 1989 and the children had remained with the father. They had lost their father in 2002 and knew nothing of the whereabouts of their mother.

In 13 of the 17 families interviewed, the father had died before the mother. Three of the families had become child headed household this year, six in 2001, three in 1999, two in 1998 and three before 1998 (five years ago.)

6.2 EXTENDED FAMILY CONNECTIONS

> *"I feel we will die on this farm and bury ourselves because our relatives do not care about us"* *Lovemore, aged 13 yrs*

Only two of the households in the survey had no contact or knowledge of some branch of their extended family. One of these two believed they had an aunt in a neighbouring farm but further investigations revealed that this lady was not a relative, but a friend of the deceased mother. Extended family members in existence included grandparents (4), Older siblings (4) and aunts/uncles (11).

[2] A Child is defined as being under the age of 18 years.

[3] Neighbours and friends

[4] FOST had intended to interview more farmers but prevailing circumstances at the time of the study made this difficult.

There were a number of reasons why these children were not living with their extended family. Three child headed households said that they had not been offered the opportunity to live with their relatives but would like to if given the opportunity. Six of them said that their relatives were also very poor and were financially unable to support them. Two said that their relatives were already supporting large extended family groups.

Four of the child headed households surveyed said that they had chosen not to stay with relatives because they had experienced abuse. In these cases the abuse was in the form of verbal abuse, being required to undertake exploitative work, not being allowed to attend school and being generally neglected. In all four cases the children felt that they were better off on their own.

Two of the families said that they have older siblings who had got married and it was no longer possible for them to care for the rest of the family. Two reported relatives outside of the country whom they were not able to contact.

During the follow up to this survey FOST found changes of circumstances for 3 of the households. One of the children has run away, reportedly to South Africa, leaving behind a younger brother uncared for. In two cases the extended family made arrangements for the care of the children. In one case, however, the children have joined an older sibling who is also now terminally ill. The effect on the orphaned children of this latest illness has been very severe.

6.3 BIRTH CERTIFICATES

A large number of the children interviewed reported that they did not possess a birth certificate or identity documents. 32 of the children (68%) said that their birth had not been registered before their parents died[5], 1 thought that their birth had been registered but did not possess the birth certificate. 14 (30%) did have birth certificates, but in some cases members of the extended family had possession of these.

6.4 WORK

Six of the children interviewed (13%) were formally working. One had a full time job and the other five undertook casual work when it was available. This comprised work on the commercial farm, work for new settlers, gold panning and vending. Many of the children interviewed said that they undertook small jobs/work for food. One child is looking after a sick sibling who has TB.

One under aged child (12 yrs old) reported that he had done some tea picking in the school holidays in the past. He did this to support his younger sister and said that he wanted to do this work. He isn't working at present because he has obtained help with food and school fees and because the farmer has told him it is not permitted to work at his age.

All of the children surveyed, with the exception of the 18-month-old baby, reported that they undertook domestic work in the household. These chores were generally delegated by the older children and were

[5] FOST has found that in most farm worker communities the parents do not make an effort to register the birth of their children until they need to, which is often not until the child has to register for grade 7 school exams. If one or both parents die before the birth certificate is sought, a blood relative can undertake the process but this can be a very difficult process.

commensurate with the child's age. The duties included cooking, washing, taking care of younger siblings, fetching water, fishing and collecting firewood.

6.5 RECREATION

All of the children spoken with said that they like to play and relax with their friends. They all said they had at least one friend. There are limited recreational facilities on many commercial farms anyway, but most said that they played with a ball (often home-made) or with items from the environment. None of the younger children surveyed had any toys of their own but one family did have access to books, through the farmer.

6.6 EDUCATION

Seventeen of the children surveyed (36%) are currently attending school or vocational training. One is at pre-school, fourteen (30%) at primary school, two at secondary school and one is undertaking vocational training. Five of those interviewed were not of school age (11%) and two had completed their education (4%).

Nineteen (40%) of the children of school age were not at school. Three (6%) had not yet started their education at all and sixteen (34%) had been forced to drop out of school before completing their education[6].

" If my mother was alive maybe I would have finished my schooling"
Timothy, aged 20 yrs

Generally, it was found that most of the children were able to complete their primary education but the older children at secondary school were more likely to be forced to drop out before they completed. There are several reasons for this. Firstly, primary education is much cheaper[7]. It is also easier to get support for primary school fees from sources such as BEAM[8] and NGOs. In addition older siblings reported that having the younger children at school freed them to go to work.

The school fees for the children interviewed came from a number of sources. Five families (30 %) had their fees paid by BEAM, three (18%) by FOST, two (12%) by the farmer and five (30%) raised the fees themselves. None of the families surveyed were given free places by the schools.

None of the children interviewed had experienced open discrimination or stigmatization at school. This may have been because FOST has undertaken a great deal of training with teachers at farm schools on psycho-social support for orphaned children. 30% did, however, admit to feeling left out, or awkward at school and were embarrassed by their attire or lack of stationery and books.

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[6] ie Completed Form 4 of secondary.

[7] Primary School fees ranged from Z$ 100 per term to a maximum of Z$ 300. Secondary school fees are normally more than 10 times the price of primary and there is much more pressure to wear school uniform and purchase books and stationery.

[8] The Government of Zimbabwe's Basic Education Assistance Module, which will pay primary school fees for the most disadvantaged children

6.7 HOUSING

All but one of the households surveyed live in poor housing conditions. Eleven of the families (65%), including three which comprised both girls and boys, were living in a single room.

This is partly a reflection of the fact that many farm worker communities have poor housing anyway, but also the fact that the child headed household tend to occupy the worst housing in the village unless a member of the family is working on the farm. Also, they lack the resources to care for and maintain their homes.

Honest and Jane

12 year old Honest and his 8 year old sister, Jane, lost their mother two years ago. They never knew their father and were living off handouts from members of the community on the farm where their mother had worked. They knew nothing about their mother's background and her family. The community also knew nothing about her and were unable to help FOST trace the family.

Although he was not able to take the children into his home, the supervisor on the farm agreed to monitor them on a daily basis and the teachers at the local school also visit them regularly. FOST have sourced funds to cover their schools fees and other expenses, which are being administered through the ward Councillor.

When FOST first met the two children they were very withdrawn and uncommunicative. The school reported that the children sometimes truanted and were aggressive at times; classic behaviour for traumatised children. Throughout, however, the two siblings have stuck closely together and are very protective of each other. When FOST first met Jane she was sitting on the step outside Honest's classroom and refused to go to her own class. She was terrified that she would lose him as well.

FOST have talked to the teachers at the school about the effects of bereavement and trauma on children and encouraged them to consider the children's psychological and social needs as well as their material needs.

Gradually Honest and Jane are becoming more open and are beginning to behave more like normal children again. Recently, the ward councillor was very moved when Honest asked if they could share the food they are being given with the members of the community that helped them when they needed it.

FOST has referred the family to the Dept. of Social Welfare, but will continue to support Honest and Jane until a more lasting solution can be found for them. Their biggest fear is that they will be separated and have to go into a home. Honest is very independent and wants to work on the farm to support the family when he leaves school.

6.8 FOOD SECURITY

All of the households visited were very food insecure. Ten of the families (59%) reported that they relied on casual work to obtain food and seven said that they relied on food given by well -wishers in the community.

Four (24%) of the families are making an attempt to grow their own food and several families reported collecting roots and fruits from the bush and fishing in local dams. There appeared to be a number of reasons why so few households grow their own food. Lack of knowledge/ expertise, no money for the inputs, fear that the produce would be stolen and no access to land were the main reasons given. The researchers also sensed a lack of motivation to grow their own food in some households. This was generally because the children were having difficulty coping with all of the responsibilities of their lives and did not have the "energy" to do more.

Two families had been allowed to keep the livestock left behind but one had then been forced to sell the livestock to get money for food and school fees and the other had had the animals stolen.

Two of the families specifically mentioned that they regularly go a whole day without eating and often were hungry. Others reported that they were often anxious about getting enough to eat. None of the families interviewed regularly ate a balanced diet.

"I remember my mother used to pack my lunch to take to school. I miss her."
Sam, aged 12 yrs

6.9 CLOTHES AND NON-FOOD ITEMS

Most of the households involved in the survey were very poor in terms of household items such as soap, blankets, cooking pots etc. Where this was not a problem it was because the farmer was giving support (two families) or FOST was facilitating this support (two families). Several of the children interviewed were in a dirty state and the one family appeared to have skin rash caused by being dirty, despite the fact that they have been given soap.

Only three (18%) of the seventeen families surveyed had inherited household items and clothing from their deceased parents. Nine (53%) said that the extended family had taken items left by the parents. One family was very distressed when they recalled the day their parent's bed was taken from them.

Only one family was entitled to money from NSSA but they had not yet received this money despite the fact that the father died over one year before.

Eleven (65%) of the families surveyed reported that they relied on being given clothing by the community, farmer or NGOs. One family had inherited their father's clothing but it was too big for them at present. Most of the children interviewed had very poor, ragged clothing and several reported that they did not have warm clothing for the coming winter. It was particularly worrying to find that some of the households visited (five, 29%) did not have blankets[9].

[9] The survey was undertaken just prior to the winter months. FOST has since followed up and procured blankets and clothing for all of the families in the survey

6.10 HEALTH

Of the forty-seven children surveyed, seventeen (36%) reported that they had been ill in the last twelve months. Nine reported minor ailments such as colds, headaches, sore limbs, stomachache etc, two had contracted malaria, four (all from the same family) had been treated for scabies and one had contracted chicken pox. One of the children interviewed is very ill at present, possibly with an HIV related illness. This child is 18 months old.

Two of the families have had deaths of siblings since the parents passed away. Two in one family and one from another.

Many of the families surveyed had poor access to health services. Although all but three of the farms have a Farm Health Worker (FHW), the average distance to the nearest health facility is 10.75km (The nearest being a clinic on the farm and the furthest being 30km away.) All families reported anxiety about having enough money to pay for medicines if any of the family became ill. All of the families interviewed said that they only go to the clinic if it is absolutely necessary.

Generally, the immunisation record for the children was good. As few as nine (19%) of the children had not had their full immunisation and only three (6%) of this figure were under the age of 12yrs. Eleven (23%) of the children did not know if they had been immunized but are now too old for this to be a major concern.

6.11 SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE

The researchers talked to the families surveyed about issues of diet, sanitation and HIV. Interestingly, it was found that most of the families had a better knowledge of HIV/AIDS than of sanitation and diet.

77 % of those interviewed were able to talk relatively knowledgeably about AIDS and the causes. Only one family appeared to have no knowledge about this subject at all. The children interviewed said that they had learnt about AIDS at school.

Knowledge about health, sanitation and diet was less comprehensive, with 60% of the households having enough knowledge to protect their health and look after themselves adequately. 30% were felt to have a very poor knowledge of health, sanitation and diet and these families were reported to be living in dirty and unhygienic circumstances.

6.12 ABUSE

Worryingly 40% (19) of the children interviewed reported that they had experienced abuse of some sort since becoming a child headed household. Two reported physical abuse[10], five said they had experienced verbal abuse[11], four had been sexually abused or an attempt at sexual abuse had been made, five reported being exploited[12] and three reported neglect by a member of the extended family prior to becoming a child headed household.

[10] Being beaten

[11] Being shouted at and/or being called derogatory names by adults

[12] Made to work for little or no payment

When they experienced abuse, or other problems, three of the households said that they had no one to turn to for help. Seven had gone to the FHW for help and five to FOST volunteers in the community. Three had talked to a friend about the incident, three had reported it to a teacher and two had reported the incident(s) to the farmer. In only one case had the perpetrator been removed from the farm.

The feeling amongst the interviewers was that many of the children found their experiences of abuse difficult to talk about with adults in the community and that this issue was, as a result, underreported.

6.13 SUPPORT/HELP FOR THE CHILD HEADED HOUSEHOLD

"We feel very bad at times. We do not have anyone to talk to"
Lyton, aged 12 yrs

Farm Health Workers and community volunteers were identified as their main sources of general help by the children. Most families had someone they could go to for general help if they needed it (three said they had no-one to turn to) but only six felt they were able to ask for financial help. Of these, two got financial help from the farmer.

Five of the families reported that they had no one they felt they could turn to for emotional support. Community volunteers (41%) were the main source of community support with only one family saying that they were able to talk to a teacher about their problems. Two families said that they supported each other and one child confided in a friend.

"I miss my parents. Especially when we are having a fight with others in the village" *Friday, aged 15 yrs*

6.14 FEELINGS ABOUT THE FUTURE

As a way of gauging the psychological condition of the children, the researchers asked the children to talk about their hopes and fears for the future.

In general there was a sense of depression and lack of hope in the households interviewed which could not be quantified. Only one child interviewed spoke openly about their lack of hope for the future but there was an overall impression from the children of a sense of powerlessness to influence the future in any positive way.

6.14.1 Fears

"*They (the resettled farmers) say we must go, but where to go? If my parents were alive they would have arranged something"*
Shereni, aged 15 yrs

The most common fear amongst the children interviewed (53%) was that they would lose their home due to the farm being resettled. 24% were worried that they would live the rest of their lives in poverty and

18% were afraid that their lives would become more difficult in the future. One child talked of his fear of becoming a "street kid". 18% expressed the fear that they would not be able to finish their education and 12 % were worried about becoming ill. One child talked of the fear of dying of AIDS.

Two families feared that they might not be able to stay together and look after each other in the future. And one child expressed his fear that he would never get his birth certificate and hence, not be able to have a good life.

The general impression from the group in the study was that the lack of parents or adult caregivers meant that the children felt much less optimistic about their future than those with parents or guardians.

6.14.2 Hopes/Aspirations

When asked what they hoped the future would hold for them, the largest proportion (21%) expressed the hope for a good job[13]. 13% of the children hoped that they would be able to complete their education and one child talked of his wish to proceed to university. Four (9%) wished to undergo vocational training. Three of the children (6%) expressed the wish to start their own business or income-generating project. All of these children felt that given an opportunity for appropriate training and access to resources that they could support themselves and their younger siblings. The extent to which these children could realistically undertake and make a success of an income generating enterprise is unclear.

Two (5%) of the children simply expressed the hope that their life would become better in the future and two also said that they hoped that the family would be able to stay together. One child talked of her desire to build her own home in the future and one wished to one day get married. One child said that he hoped to get his identification documents. One child said that she did not think about the future and had no hopes.

6.14.3 Expectations for the future

"Our life will be hell soon." *Eriah, aged 17 yrs*

When asked what they felt would *actually* happen to them in the future, over three quarters of the children said that they felt pessimistic about their future. 29% said they did not know what the future held and 47% said that they thought their lives would get worse. 36% said they thought that they would not be able to complete their education and 18% said they thought that they would always be poor.

24% of the children surveyed were optimistic about their future. 12% expressed the opinion that once they were old enough they would be able to get a job and then their lives would improve. 2 children (4%) said that they were confident that the farmer would continue to help them and one thought that she would be able to start a business and build her own home.

In general, most of the children surveyed focused on their feelings about the material aspects and few talked of the emotional and social sides to their lives such as love, marriage, family, children. When the interviewers probed into the children's feelings there was a very guarded response. The impression was that these children are unused to talking about their feelings with adults and that many of them had

[13] The sorts of jobs talked about were being a farm driver (4), a mechanic, teacher and nurse.

actually “shut down” their emotions as a survival strategy to help them cope with their difficult circumstances.

“If I don’t get help or a job my life will never change. I will forever be poor”
Timothy, aged 20 yrs

The extended family is often already overloaded

7. Summary of the findings: The Community

7.1 THE PERCEPTION OF CHILD HEADED HOUSEHOLDS

All of the respondents reported that they were worried about the children in these child headed household and wanted to be able to help in some way. They also reported that many people in the wider community were concerned and wished to help. Two of the respondents did claim that they felt that the community did not care about the children and one claimed that "people have too many problems of their own". Two people said that the child headed household was seen as a problem by the community because of their anti-social behaviour (being aggressive, withdrawn, uncommunicative, alcohol abuse) and three felt that the children had isolated themselves from the community which made it difficult to help them[14].

7.2 HELP FROM THE COMMUNITY

Help from the community came mainly in the form of supportive visits and monitoring (44%) by neighbours, volunteers and the FHW. Only one person spoken to said that the children received financial help from the community. One also said that they gave the children work to do in return for food and clothing[15]. Six respondents admitted that they were not doing anything to help the children and one said this was because they were unaware of the children's circumstances (a teacher from a school located on a neighbouring farm). Other respondents expressed the guilt they felt by visiting the home and not being able to offer material help. They felt that visiting "empty handed" was embarrassing.

7.3 WHAT COULD BE DONE TO HELP CHILD HEADED HOUSEHOLDS?

There was a general feeling amongst the community members interviewed that more should and could be done to help the orphaned children in their community. This issue was explored in some depth during the interviews and all possible sources of support were discussed.

7.3.1 Possible help from the community

The majority of respondents felt that the community could offer moral support to the child headed household even if they were not able to offer material support. 63 % mentioned that they could offer "guidance", "advice" and "teach them about life". 56% talked of discussing the issue with the community as a whole. One person thought that the elders should be consulted and three talked of setting up a committee to take responsibility for the children and 50% felt that it was possible to set up a system of monitoring the children's welfare. 75% of the respondents mentioned the possibility of offering material support (food 31%, clothing 25%, financial 13%.) 13% said that it was possible to give the children help with the household chores and one person mentioned helping the children to build a better house.

In communities where FOST has already undertaken development programmes, there were in evidence community projects[16] or projects run by the children themselves[17]. These had helped to meet some of the

[14] Demonstrating a poor understanding of the signs of trauma in children

[15] Whether this "work" was exploitative was difficult to assess

[16] Gardening, sewing or poultry projects

[17] Often supervised by the school

material needs of the child headed households and to encourage the children and community to work together in a cohesive way. The current economic pressures and uncertainties around the future of the communities have, however, threatened these initiatives significantly.

One suggestion from the community was that they could help the children start a project (19%), make sure the BEAM committee were aware of the children (6%) liaise with the farmer (6%) and help with "peacekeeping" when the children argued.

There was a general reluctance to approach extended family members about the children's welfare. One person said that they may become involved in a dispute and others said that this was not their role. The lack of a traditional community structure is very noticeable here.

7.3.2 What the Government should be doing

There was an overwhelming feeling amongst the respondents that the children should remain at school and complete their education. 88% of the people interviewed felt that the government should make schooling free to orphaned children and 31% said that the BEAM system was not enough. One person said that this assistance should continue to include vocational training.

Nine (34%) respondents felt that the government should offer financial assistance to child headed households and three (11%) felt that the government should offer support for the children to set up income generating projects. Three people also felt that the Registrar General's office should do more to help the children get their birth certificates. One person felt that the Department of Social Welfare should be given more resources so that they could "do their job properly".

7.3.3 What the farmers could do

The community felt that the farmers could help these children by allowing them to stay on the farm (31%) and offering them good accommodation (31%). 13% said that the farmer should give the children the parents' pension and one felt that the children should be given some land on which to grow vegetables. 19% said that the farmer should provide the children with food.

One of the farmers interviewed expressed the opinion that farmers should be doing more and taking more responsibility for vulnerable children on their farm. The other felt that this was not their role. They thought that it was the community's responsibility but that the farmer should support the community by making resources available.

7.3.4 What NGOs could do

The biggest role for NGOs was seen as offering material support (63%) but there was also a feeling that NGOs have a useful role in raising awareness (48%) and in liaising with the farmer, the Dept. of Social Welfare and other stakeholders. 31% said that NGOs could help by training the community in counselling skills and 20% felt that NGOs could do training and workshops with the children to teach them life skills. Two (8%) people talked of how NGOs could offer support for income generating projects.

A significant number (31%) also talked of NGOs offering psycho-social support for the children. When this was explored there was an acknowledgement that psycho-social support had to come from the immediate community but it was felt that there was the need for an "outsider" to also take an interest in the children to make them feel valued. The possibility of this causing resentment amongst other children in the community was discussed but most respondents felt that this problem would not arise if the whole community are aware of the situation of the children and are involved in the programme.

There was also a feeling in communities where volunteers are already involved in the FOST programme(56%), that more could be done to support the volunteers to avoid overload and burn out.

7.4 FEARS FOR THE CHILDREN'S FUTURE

Many of the community members expressed fears for the children's future. The largest concern (56%) was that the serious financial and food shortages would mean that the capacity of the community to help would be further eroded. There was also a real worry about what would happen to the children if the farm was resettled (75%). Three people worried about the risk of abuse (10%) and two people felt that the children might have to engage in work to support themselves. One person feared that the children would become criminals.

7.5 WHAT PARENTS COULD DO TO PREPARE CHILDREN

The community members were asked about what parents could do before they died to prevent these situations. 38% said that the parents should save money so that the children will have resources if the parents pass away. 25% said that parents should talk to the children and give them advice so that they will know what to do and who to go to for help. The kind of advice they felt the parent should give was:

"Stay together and help each other"
"Be united and care for each other"
"Work hard at school"
"Do not be naughty"

There was an acknowledgement of the cultural taboos around talking about death, especially to children, but that the culture needed to, and could, adapt to the new circumstances in which we find ourselves (25%).

Two people said that they thought that the parents could identify who they would like to care for the children after their death and make the arrangements. Two others felt that children should be taught to be self-reliant so that they are equipped to cope if they lose their parents.

Child headed households often live in poor conditions

Liana

When FOST first met Liana, she was living on a farm near Mutare. Liana is albino which means that she has a lot of health problems, her eyesight is very poor and her skin is very sensitive to the strong sun. As well as health problems, being albino means that Liana experiences social sigmatisation and has been rejected by her family and the community.

Liana is 17 years old and both of her parents died several years ago. At the time of her parents death Laina was in Grade 3 at school. Most of her family refused to have anything to do with her and she was forced to leave school to live with her older sister who was working on the farm. Liana lived with her sister but was not able to pay school fees. Hence, Liana has never progressed any further with her education and is effectively illiterate.

Liana's sister later died leaving her with no income or support and her other brothers and sisters refused to have anything to do with her. Liana had never been out of the area and therefore had no idea what to do or where to go. The farmer allowed her to stay in the farm village and tried to find her work on the farm. The farm produces flowers and, hence, her bad eyesight made it difficult for Liana to work to the accuracy required. As a result she was forced into begging for food and was being exploited and abused by the people in the farm village. She was forced to undertake domestic work and to collect firewood all day simply to get a meal and her poor eyesight meant that she lost or had stolen anything of value she ever owned. When FOST first visited Liana she was wearing dirty, tattered clothes and seemed to have very little hope for a better future.

Initially FOST talked to the community and tried to ensure that Liana had food and the other items she needed to live on a day to day basis. We received donations from various sources and the health worker at the farm kept an eye on her. Later FOST secured a place for Liana on an Orphans and Vulnerable Children's (OVC) course in Bulawayo where she learnt life skills and was given information about her rights, how to protect herself from abuse and where to go for help in a crisis.

This experience also proved to be turning point for Liana. On return from Bulawayo Liana said that she wanted to undertake some vocational training. FOST secured a place for her at Marange Technical College, where she is learning permaculture and doing adult literacy classes. Next year, she will expand her course to include dressmaking.

Since attending the college, Liana has grown in confidence and recently went to visit her older brother. She has arranged to stay with him during the next holidays and says that she will move there permanently after her course finishes. Now that she has skills and more self-confidence her family are more willing to accept her and offer her a home.

Liana dreams that one day she will have her own home and a dress making business.

8. Problems faced by Child Headed Households

The study found that the following main problems faced by the child headed families surveyed were generally the same problems that many orphaned children face. These can be summarized as a lack of:

- Food security: A reliance on food donations from the community, support from external sources and collection of food from the environment. The experience of times when no food is available. The coping mechanisms of these households are dependent on a relatively healthy economy. When the food security of the whole community is threatened, as it is at present, this safety net can disappear. Many of the community members interviewed expressed the desire to offer more help but were unable to because they were also short of food in their own household. There was a strong feeling that outside help should be offered in terms of food and other material support.

- Educational opportunities: Being forced to drop out of school and not being able to complete secondary education. Lack of opportunities to undertake vocational training which might offer an opportunity for a better future. This problem is attributed not just to a lack of funds to pay school fees but also to the need for school uniforms, stationery, and books and to overcome stigmatization.

- Material needs: Clothing, household items and non-food consumables were in very short supply. Many households did not even have the most basic of resources.

- Psycho-Social Support: Most of these households had nowhere to turn for emotional and social support to help the children cope with the problems they face. This was identified by virtually all of the community respondents as an area where they and others in the community could do more. There appeared to be a lack of confidence about how to go about this and a general sense of helplessness. It was also noted that the children themselves were showing real signs of trauma and stress as a result of their situation. Although they were apparently coping on a daily basis on a superficial level, they were losing their social energy, their initiative and hope for the future. Very few of the children interviewed felt that they would have a better future and many did not see any reason to work hard to improve their lives.

- Skills and knowledge: In particular in the areas of basic life skills. This means that younger children do not have the opportunities to learn life skills or have access to the cultural knowledge which usually comes from the parents and family. It was particularly worrying to see how little knowledge the children had of important issues such as sanitation and health. In addition, it is a concern that the circumstances in which these households find themselves make them vulnerable to abuse and exploitation and puts them at increased risk of HIV infection.

- Support and contact with the extended family, even where these family members are living relatively nearby. This is linked to the severe economic and emotional stress faced by the extended family as well as stigmatization and exploitation the orphaned children can face within their own extended family.

- Protection from abuse and exploitation: There is evidence that child headed households are vulnerable to abuse and exploitation in a number of ways and generally have no one to turn to for protection when at risk.

- Poor housing conditions: Many of the child headed households are living in overcrowded and unhygienic living conditions. They have no tenure security and their continued access to shelter is dependant on the goodwill of the farmer. There are real fears about their future as farms are resettled.

- Poor access to health care: Which is a common problem for farm worker communities in general. The additional constraints of child headed households, their lack of knowledge related to health and the fact that there is often no-one to monitoring their health means that theses children are additionally vulnerable. Although there was a reasonable knowledge of HIV, it is felt that child headed households are at risk of HIV infection due to their need to support themselves and the lack of protection they have in the community.

Although these are common problems faced by many orphaned children in a range of different circumstances, it is felt that child headed households are much more vulnerable and at risk because they do not have the material and personal resources to cope with the problems that they encounter on a daily basis. Many of the heads of these families do not have the skills or knowledge to ensure that they are living healthy lives and to protect themselves from exploitation and abuse.

In addition, children living in commercial farm communities do not have access to the traditional support systems (what can be called "safety nets") that are in existence in communal areas. The economic and social 'safety nets' such as the extended family and traditional community leadership structures that exist in other areas are not present and the prevalence of non-formalised marriages often means that men lack any sense of responsibility for the children from any relationships they develop. As a result, the extended family does not acknowledge any responsibility for children from these "marriages".

Further more, the current economic and social situation on commercial farms means that the support structures that do exist for these children are under severe stress and in danger of disintegrating. The extended family and community in general are facing severe economic hardships, food shortages and social upheavals. In these circumstances there is nothing to spare to give to non-family child headed households.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

These finding suggest that there are two main gaps in the support available for child headed households in commercial farm worker communities:

9.1 Physical/material support:

As outlined in Section 8, this includes food, clothing, shelter, school fees and non-food household items. There is serious doubt about whether any intervention to support orphaned children can undertake to meet all of these needs in a long-term, sustainable way. The "traditional" FOST approach has been to build capacity within communities, and the child headed household itself, to meet these needs whilst simultaneously advocating for the needs of orphaned children and their caregivers in farm worker communities to be included in mainstream interventions such as BEAM, National AIDS Programme etc. This survey suggests, however, that it is necessary to reconsider this "policy" for child headed households for two reasons.

Firstly, child headed households are the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children in farm communities and should be considered a special case when looking at material support. For one reason or another they do not have an extended family network to fall back on and are forced to meet these needs themselves. As a result the older children are deprived of the opportunity to go to school and they may be exposed to abuse and exploitation in order to obtain the basic needs for themselves and their younger siblings.

In addition, even where there are community initiatives to help child headed household these are breaking down under the severe economic hardships and food shortages being experienced by all elements of the community. The uncertainty and insecurity around the land reform process have exacerbated this. Asking community members to take responsibility for non-family members in these difficult circumstances is not easy.

It is recommended, therefore, that short-term interventions are implemented to provide material support for child headed households until such time as the community are able to offer this support. This material support should, however, be offered in conjunction with psycho-social support activities which involve the children themselves and key stakeholders in the community so that community safety nets can be built and sustained and the community can be empowered to access other more lasting sources of support.

9.2 Psycho-social support

This category of need incorporates a whole range on non-material support which enables child headed households to live a happy and well integrated life and have some sort of normal childhood. This includes having someone to offer love and affection, someone to turn to for help, advice, guidance, protection and support in times of crisis, giving the children hope for the future and enabling them to develop to their full potential and as normal and healthy young people. Material support alone will not facilitate this.

During the survey, FOST noted that in some of the child headed household surveyed there was a reasonable level of material support but that the children often lacked the "social energy" which enabled them to take opportunities that arose or to develop a positive approach to life. The fact that so few households grew their own food and that so few children had approached key members of the

community directly for more systematic help is evidence that these children are severely traumatised by their experiences and situation and need help to regain their natural "social energy".

It was also noted that younger children rely on their older siblings for emotional support and social guidance, which can create an unbearable strain on the young people concerned. This may have been the reason why one of the heads of family ran away recently.

This is an area where the community as a whole can play a key role. The community may not have material resources but they are able to offer social and emotional support to orphaned children. This would involve regular supportive visits to the families, taking an interest in the children, their progress at school, monitoring their health, involving them in recreational and social events and offering care and "love". This can be facilitated by encouraging all sections of the farm worker community including community leaders such as farm health workers, teachers and pre-school leaders, the youth and parents to offer this supportive and enabling environment.

There is also a need to undertake preventative work, to create an environment where the community no longer find it acceptable to have children left unsupported and strategies are developed to prevent this happening.

It is therefore recommended that psycho-social support (PSS) interventions be initiated targeted at key stakeholders in the community. In addition, the orphaned children themselves should be targeted for training to build their life skills in aspects such as health, sanitation, HIV/AIDS as well as building up their resilience and enabling them to overcome bereavement, trauma and stigmatization.

10. INTERVENTIONS

The findings of this small study indicate that there is a clear need for appropriate interventions to address the immediate needs of child headed household in farm worker communities and to develop sustainable responses to these needs which can be both responsive and preventative in nature.

Although FOST has been working for three years in some of these communities to some positive effect, it is evident that interventions need to be long term in nature and to offer both material and psycho-social support for orphaned children and their communities.
The following interventions are suggested.

10.1 Mobilisation of the community: volunteers

It is clear that in any sustainable response it is necessary to "mobilise" the community to offer a supportive and enabling environment for child headed household and orphaned children in general. There is already a network of volunteers, neighbours and FHWs who do undertake this but the need for a more comprehensive response is necessary. This would involve community meetings in farming community not already involved in the programme and a system of supportive visits to these and farms already in the programme.

A clear system of identifying, training and supporting volunteers in the community will also reinforce this aspect to avoid overload and "burnout".

10.2 Psycho-Social Support (PSS)

This is an area that appears to be undervalued by the community in general and where the community underestimate the contribution they could make to improve the quality of life of the child headed households. PSS training should therefore be offered to:

- The community in general. Covering basic skills in counselling and supporting traumatised children could be offered to key members of the community such as FHWs, Pre-school leaders, teachers, volunteers and any other community leaders.
- The orphaned children themselves to enable them to talk about their experiences and develop peer support networks
- Youth in the community. There is growing evidence that young people are able to offer effective psycho-social support for younger orphaned children, are often able to help them through problems and crises and are better able to talk to them about sensitive subjects such as abuse.

Training could involve topics such as:

- Psycho-Social Support in general. FOST already has suitable materials prepared and tested with farm communities which cover topics such as "how children react to the death of loved one," "bereavement and children", "talking to children about death" etc .
- Child protection and prevention of abuse
- Dealing with traumatised children, as individuals and in groups
- HIV/AIDS prevention
- Personal identity and cultural belonging

In addition, a handbook for volunteers would reinforce the training process and help to improve and develop the psycho-social element of the intervention.

10.3 Material Support

Although it is unsustainable to offer long term material support for all orphaned children, it may be necessary to offer selective and targeted interventions for the most disadvantaged households in crisis situations. This support could be implemented in a number of ways:

- Respond to specific requests: Offer material support as and when it is requested, with each request assessed individually. This would, perhaps, encourage the child headed household to remain as self reliant as possible and avoid the possibility that the child

headed household and community will become over reliant on external funding. The disadvantage is that the child headed household may feel demeaned and ashamed to be constantly asking for help. In addition, communication problems in commercial farms may be a barrier to a swift response.

- Support for "foster" parents: Encouraging households in the community to "foster" the children either by taking them into their homes as guests[18], or by undertaking to visit them on daily basis and offer the kind of support a parent would give (eg advice, guidance, help with chores, clothes, follow progress at school etc.) In return the "foster" family and the child headed household is given material support.

- "Adopt a household": The project could source funds to cover the main expenses of a specific household such as food, clothing, school fees, medical expenses etc. This could be linked to external sources of funding whereby a church or group "adopt" the family and undertake to support them.

- "Adopt a community": Instead of "adopting" a specific family, the whole community is supported in the development of systems to help child headed households such as income generating projects, safe places, volunteer networks etc. This is a response which potentially benefits all children in the community, not just the child headed household. In return, the community agree to care for the child headed household and all OVC. This has been FOSTs preferred approach to material needs to date and works relatively well in a stable social environment but tends to breakdown under economic or social stress. In current conditions it would need regular and thorough monitoring.

- Supplementary feeding: The provision of supplementary feeding programmes in the current emergency situation which benefits all children in the community and enables the most vulnerable to obtain extra help.

- Educational support: Covering school fees and other educational costs for the children or provision of vocational training for older siblings. This would complement the government BEAM programme.

There are a number of dangers with offering material support of the kinds outlined above. Firstly, by offering material incentives to the community it may destroy the volunteerism that has gradually developed in many farm worker communities. Once destroyed, this is immensely hard to rebuild. In the long term there will be growing need

[18] A culturally acceptable approach if the orphaned children are seen as household guests and not as formal members of the family.

to cultivate volunteerism in order to respond to the growing orphan crisis. There is a need, therefore, to find ways to recognise the input of volunteers and build on it in a sustainable way.

Secondly, by offering support to child headed households only, it may encourage orphaned children to stay alone and extended families to abandon the household in the belief that the children will then have a better chance of getting material support.

It is very difficult to strike the right balance between encouraging community-based voluntary responses and offering material support. Linking material support to PSS is, perhaps, one way to achieve this.

10.4 Income-Generating Projects (IGPs)

Linked to the idea of material support is the possibility of offering opportunities for older siblings in child headed households to set up IGPs by facilitating vocational training and then offering start-up capital or seed funding. This is an area which could lead to a more sustainable response to the issue and have a trickle-down affect to the whole household and the community in general. It would, however, need thorough training, support and monitoring for the children.

One problem at present would be the stability of the communities in which these children live and the future prospects for these communities. It would also require a considerable amount of support and expertise which FOST does not necessarily have at present, but which could either be developed or acquired through relevant partnerships with other NGOs.

10.5 Advocacy

Advocacy work with local authorities and national forums to ensure that orphaned children on commercial farms are included on national, provincial and district agendas, which is crucial for a sustainable approach. Also to ensure that the children benefit from national resource allocations such as BEAM, National AIDS Council funds etc. In addition, to ensure that farm communities, and child headed households within them, are considered in the land redistribution programme.

10.6 Case work approach

This would mean FOST undertaking to help individual child headed households with specific needs eg family tracing and reunification, securing personal identity documents, counselling etc. Past experience shows that this is a very time consuming and intensive activity and the sheer scale of the problem makes it difficult to offer this type of intervention in a comprehensive way. FOST can, however, attempt to build the skills and capacity within communities to do this and to help communities link with the Department of Social Welfare who have role to play here.

10.7 Pre-emptive work

Awareness raising and training with the community at large to encourage communities as individuals and as groups to prevent child headed households, through preparing in advance for the future of children. This will involve work with communities about preparing for their death, making a will, talking to children about death, making plans for the children etc. This is a highly sensitive issue but an area where attitude change is necessary to ensure that all children have a safe and secure future.

11. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study show that child headed households on commercial farms are living in very difficult circumstances without sustained adult guidance. Although there are some support mechanisms within communities, these are generally ad hoc and lack a cohesive and comprehensive response to the needs of child headed households and other vulnerable children. In addition, the social and economic stress being experienced by farm worker communities at present puts any existing responses under severe strain and exacerbates the feelings of insecurity and hopelessness felt by orphaned children and child headed households especially.

Any future interventions to respond to the needs of child headed households identified in this study will need to balance material and psycho-social aspects in order to avoid undermining already existing coping mechanisms. Involvement of all key stakeholders, including young people and the children themselves is crucial. Supporting community-based responses will involve long-term capacity building and training and require thorough support and follow-up.

"This is a tough game, especially when you don't have anything." *Gaston, aged 17 yrs*

Through psycho-social support and skills development orphaned children have a bright future