

Key themes for Save the Children UK in Mozambique:

- HIV and AIDS
- Protection
- Food security and emergency preparedness



Mozambique has known almost 15 years of peace since the civil war ended in 1992. The country has been making huge efforts towards rebuilding the economy and people's livelihoods. But it suffered setbacks with severe floods in 2000 and 2001, followed by drought in 2002, 2003, and again in 2005. These emergencies affected millions of people across the country, and led to widespread food shortages and the spread of infectious diseases such as cholera.

In addition to natural disasters, Mozambique faces many other challenges. It is estimated that 48 per cent of children are chronically malnourished. Life expectancy is just 42 years. The HIV and AIDS pandemic has had a devastating impact, leaving more than a quarter of a million children orphaned. Many others have to look after sick relatives or work to help their family survive from day to day. Over half of the country's 19.4 million people are under 18 years old and there are more than 1.6 million orphans. The government abolished school enrolment fees two years ago and enrolment of children in primary school was 83 per cent in 2005. However, many children fail to complete primary education because their families cannot afford schoolbooks and uniforms and because children have to work to contribute to household income.

SAVE THE CHILDREN IN MOZAMBIQUE

Save the Children UK began working in Mozambique in 1984, providing emergency aid to children and families displaced by the war. Since the war ended, we have shifted our focus to development projects. But the floods and droughts of recent years have highlighted the need to be ready to respond to emergencies, as children tend to be most vulnerable during times of crisis. We have experience in child protection; emergency preparedness and food security; HIV and AIDS prevention and care; education; health programmes; livelihoods and social protection; and advocating for children's rights at community, provincial and national levels. We work in six districts in the south of Zambezia province located in the central region of the country, mainly in Morrumbala and Mopeia. Zambezia is one of the most populated and poorest provinces in the country, particularly in rural areas. We work with the government, donors, international and local non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and local communities.

Over the past 22 years, we have improved the lives of tens of thousands of children through providing basic services such as healthcare and education, and through our child protection work, focusing on orphans and other vulnerable children. We have provided food, access to clean water and other basic assistance to children and their families during times of emergency. We have helped thousands of children register their birth so they are eligible for government benefits and other support. And we continue to help children who are affected by HIV and AIDS.

In all our programmes, we encourage children to participate at every stage. We help them to communicate their problems and needs to community leaders, parents, teachers, health workers, and government officials, so that they can have more of a say in decisions that affect them.

In addition to our programme work over several decades, Save the Children recently began focusing particular attention on improving our advocacy and communication activities. Through these efforts, we have observed an increase in national, regional and international media coverage of our various initiatives, and increased dialogue with our government and local partners. These activities contribute to raising the profile of children's rights and protection issues in Mozambique, and will potentially help with future fundraising.

KEY AREAS OF WORK

HIV and AIDS

The legacy of the war in Mozambique, combined with widespread poverty and the impact of the HIV and AIDS pandemic, means that hundreds of thousands of children experience malnutrition, disease and neglect. Our programme for orphans and vulnerable children affected by HIV and AIDS helps local communities identify the children most in need, and find practical ways to improve their lives. We work closely with children themselves as well as with community leaders, parents and caregivers, teachers and government officials responsible for their welfare. Some of our projects include:

Orphans and vulnerable children committees

In the last two years, we have supported 36 orphans and vulnerable children committees in Zambezia province, benefiting 38,000 children, almost half of them girls. Children are involved in the groups, either directly or through forming their own subcommittees. This means they voice their views on the problems they face, and help parents and community leaders explore possible solutions. The committees also help children in a number of other ways: helping them go to and stay in school, for example, by arranging for someone to help with chores at home if a parent or grandparent is ill. The committees also motivate people to take advantage of birth registration campaigns. In areas where the committees operate, 27 per cent of eligible children had their births registered, compared with just 12 per cent in other areas.

Livelihood and social protection grants

We have introduced a scheme to address the immediate as well as the longer-term needs of orphans and vulnerable children. We award small grants (up to £500) to community, faith-based and non-governmental organisations and associations that demonstrate they are having a positive impact on the lives of vulnerable children. We have supported vegetable gardens run by women's groups and goat-rearing projects that result in children having more food to eat. We have funded community wells so that children have better access to clean water, and we have supported seeds and tools projects. So far more than 6,200 children (nearly half of them girls) have benefited from these grants.

Education fairs

One of the most innovative ways in which we help children is through education fairs. Our research with local communities found that many children do not go to school because their families cannot afford books, uniforms and other materials. Most of those who do go to school tend to drop out: for every 100 children enrolled in the first year, only 12 reach grade seven. Our experience shows that lack of education is closely linked to continuing poverty. So in 2005 and 2006, we held education fairs in the districts of Morrumbala and Mopeia. In 2006, more than 3,500 of the most vulnerable children, as identified by local orphans and vulnerable children committees, were given cash vouchers worth £3 to buy whatever school items they were most in need of (exercise books, pens, clothes or shoes). Our aim is to not only increase the number of children who not only enrol in school, but to help them to stay on and complete their schooling.

Home-based care

We support national and local organisations to help limit the destructive impact of HIV and AIDS on orphans and other vulnerable children and young people. We help these children and their families mostly through the activities of the orphans and vulnerable children committees in the areas where we work. In addition, we have trained 78 people as home-based care volunteers in Morrumbala District. The volunteers are trained to provide basic medical assistance to chronically ill people and to give counselling and moral support. They also help children who are looking after a sick family member, by encouraging the children to go to school or have time to play. The volunteers are linked with the committees, who are often able to identify children or families who need to be referred for help. To date, 145 girls and 178 boys in families that have chronically ill members have benefited from this programme, and we are planning to train more volunteers in 2007 to meet the increased need for home-based care and support.

Public awareness and advocacy

The government of Mozambique approved the second national strategic plan for HIV and AIDS in November 2004, with a focus on prevention. More recently, in 2006, a national action plan for orphans and vulnerable children was approved. This is concerned with providing access to basic social services, as well as increasing access to antiretroviral medicines for people living with HIV and AIDS. Save the Children and other organisations helped shape these plans through representation on the committees set up to prepare them. But children aged 5–12 are not covered by the guidelines for prevention and care. This is a gap that needs to be addressed in future, and we will work to ensure that children are placed at the centre of all development plans and policies, including those relating to HIV and AIDS.

Protection

Raising awareness among local organisations and networks

Over the last three years we have been running a project to protect Mozambican children from neglect, abuse, exploitation and violence. We support several national organisations to campaign for child protection and respect for children's rights. One, Rede Came, is a national network against child abuse that promotes knowledge and awareness of children's rights among community leaders, police, judges, health workers, teachers, and government officials. We also work with the Children's Rights League to set up mechanisms to report child abuse at the community level, as there are currently no systems in place to do this.

Part of our work involves trying to change attitudes about violence towards children. We have recently stepped up our efforts through our advocacy and communications work. Together with Rede da Criança, another national children's rights network, we have been lobbying for children to participate in a revision of the laws on child protection and juvenile justice. In April 2006, a group of young people aged 12-17 delivered a petition to politicians and officials responsible for drafting the new laws. They also spoke about their experiences, and about children's rights, on a national radio programme. In this way, we are helping ensure that children have a say in matters that affect them.

Public awareness and advocacy

In March 2006, we published a report, *A Bridge Across the Zambezi: What needs to be done for children?*, highlighting the increased risks of child prostitution and exploitative labour during the construction of a bridge over the Zambezi river. Our report received a great deal of media coverage in Mozambique, as there are already issues around exploitation of children (particularly girls) at the ferry crossing points. There is evidence that large-scale construction projects that bring in male workers with significant disposable income can lead to a rise in the number of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and increased rates of HIV infection. HIV prevalence rates in the two provinces that would be connected by the bridge – Sofala and Zambezia – are already high, at around 26 and 18 per cent respectively. Our report calls for a number of practical measures by the government and others to ensure that children are protected and not drawn into dangerous

activities as a result of the construction project, which has the potential to bring many positive benefits to the local, regional and national economy.

We also released a preliminary study highlighting the vulnerability of children from Zimbabwe crossing into Mozambique in search of food and work. The study was disseminated in late May 2006 and has already received national and international media attention. We will be carrying out further research and advocacy activities and discussing with government ministries and local organisations how best to protect these children from neglect, abuse and exploitation.

We also work with other members of the International Save the Children Alliance in Mozambique (Save the Children US and Save the Children Norway) in the areas of child protection and food security.

Food security and emergency preparedness

Mozambique has had to cope with frequent natural disasters. The 2005 drought, followed by heavy rains and flooding in some areas, affected more than a million people. Floods in 2000 and 2001, followed by two years of successive drought, affected more than half a million people in southern and central Mozambique. Natural disasters, especially when they happen frequently, have a huge impact on people's ability to grow enough food to feed themselves and their families. These events highlighted the need for Save the Children and our local partners to remain constantly prepared to respond to emergencies on the ground, and particularly to the needs of children. We provide rapid support to vulnerable families so that child malnutrition rates do not worsen when emergencies occur.

Emergency response

In early 2006, we provided more than 600 emergency household kits to families in Zambezia and Sofala provinces who were displaced by the floods, benefiting 2,300 children and their families. We also distributed food to 3,175 vulnerable people (most of them children) over a five-month period.

Technical support to partners

We closely monitor the food security and emergency situation in Zambezia province, together with the National Institute for Disaster Management and the Technical Secretariat for Food Security and Nutrition. We also offer technical support to these agencies to help them collect and analyse information on food security among vulnerable households. In early 2006, we trained 50 people from government ministries and other organisations on best practice for child protection in emergencies. We also produce an emergency information bulletin twice a month, so that there is an early warning of any likely crisis.

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