

Highlights of "Beads of Hope" Visit to Zambia March 2004: Presentations by Ruth Anne Sutherland

Background & Purpose	<p>Ruth Anne Sutherland is a nutritionist from Halifax and an M&S enthusiast at her church. She was the Maritime Conference representative on the United Church Women's Visit to Zambia, envisioned and supported by UCW.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The trip to visit the UCC Partners in Zambia (church and non-governmental organizations) was to gain understanding of the challenges they face with the HIV/AIDS pandemic and related problems. • Ruth Anne made a 90 minute slide presentation w questions in the morning and 20 minutes with questions for Woolastook Presbytery meeting in the afternoon, Feb. 24th.
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Zambia's Challenges

Scope of Challenges	<p>Ruth Anne's slide presentation 'connected-the-dots' among a number of issues.</p> <p><u>HIV/AIDS epidemic:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Only 3000 of 250,000 Zambians needing drugs were receiving anti-retroviral drugs in 2003. • The infection rate was down but deaths resulting from earlier infections were increasing. • In their population of 10 million, 100,000 new AIDS cases were expected in 2004 (compared to Canada expecting 2000 in population of 30+ million). <p><u>Poverty/Malnutrition</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Surviving without income sources leaves people open to sexual exploitation/ infection. • Malnutrition was widespread: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Increased starvation and deaths from malaria, cholera, TB, resulted (Orphans' tiny stature shocked UCC visitors when actual ages of the children were given.) -AIDS drugs are dependent on good nutritional inputs in order to work in restoring health <p><u>Gender Roles</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Abstinence" is often not an HIV prevention option for women in subordinate roles. • Women do 70% of the farm work. Their early deaths leave no one trained to farm.
Impact of HIV/AIDS on Private Life	<p>Almost no one in Zambia is unaffected by the HIV/AIDS epidemic: " If you are not infected you are affected"</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Almost every family the visitors met is caring for orphans. • One woman, about age 60 was caring for 16 people – ill or orphaned. • People ill with AIDS are often abandoned by the family so that isolation and the fear of isolation are potent factors against testing, taking precautions and treatment. (in some groups as many as 60% think they have HIV infection, only 20% do!)
Impact on Public Life	<p>The epidemic impacts on every sphere of public life, reducing Zambia's ability to respond:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education and Health workers are reduced in number – one doctor said that 15 of his graduating class of 55 had died of AIDS. • Companies are losing trained labour force to AIDS illness and deaths. • Agriculture has lost so many women, who are the farmers, that even the recent crop recovery due to rains is 2.5 to 3 times less than it could have been.

Structural Factors Worsen the Challenge

History	<p>Historical and institutional factors have created structural difficulties that work against Zambia's social and political efforts to deal with their already serious challenges:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At the 1964 time of Zambian Independence from Rhodesia, Zambia's copper industry provided a source of wealth. • The price of copper then fell. • As the price of oil rose, oil-producing countries were anxious to loan their money. • Zambia fell into debt, unable to repay with copper prices low & petroleum product prices rising.
Fiscal	<p><i>The cost of servicing Zambia's debt in 2004 was 2 1/2 times the Health+ Education budget</i></p>
Social Physical Infra-structure	<p>IMF rules require indebted countries like Zambia to give priority to debt repayment by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cut backs in social services and infrastructure • Privatization of health and education (1/3 primary age & 2/3 secondary age not in school!) • Devaluing the currency, Selling off public enterprises • Removal of subsidies on maize (causing near riots in Zambia under Kenneth Kaunda) <p>IMF rules for agricultural production favour cash crops for export, instead of food for the populace.</p>

United Church & Partners Face the Challenges Effectively

Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our church Partner, "Mindolo Ecumenical Foundation" is training young women in the care of orphans and vulnerable children - a sustainable form of support to carry on. • Zambian Student Christian Movement has a powerful peer education ministry in schools/ universities, around sexual abstinence before marriage and empowering young girls to have goals for their future. Slides showed their skit about the ways and dangers of a "Sugar Daddy".
Orphanages & Hospices & Home Care-	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Zambia had an estimated 1,000,000 orphans (10% population) in 2002 • Our partners support orphans through providing training to increase income of caregivers. Support for orphan's education reduces burden on caregivers. • Partners provide services to hospices for the ill, but also services of training home-based care givers. -Ill persons are often surprised at home by volunteer caregivers who prepare meals, bathe, and clean (providing scarce cleaning materials), and transport them to outpatient clinics. -Counseling is provided to patients and relatives to extend the care practices.
Testing/Counseling Services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kara provides voluntary testing and counseling: 12% of women had been tested for HIV and know the results, compared to only 5% , five years before.
Social Change/ Economic Enterprise	<p>Women for Change is a Zambian NGO Partner started by CUSO. United Church funding was first, and triggered funding from many NGOs and countries some years ago– so the Visitors were warmly welcomed! The Women address 3 factors that strengthen the fight against HIV/AIDS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They work with and empower remote rural communities, especially women, through sensitizing to equality of gender roles (often with humour) and use popular education to eradicate all forms of poverty. Their Slogan "Women + Men=Partners in Development" • Varied economic development projects alleviate poverty &, hunger and increase resources for families to provide health and education. (One group were Batiking beautiful fabric for sale.) • Women for Change work with the tribal Chiefs, custodians of the land, who can enforce the law for a widow to inherit her land, preventing appropriation by the husband's family. (One Chief the visitors met was an engineering graduate of Berkley.)

Progress Reported/Future Efforts Needed

Stephen Lewis Speech	<p>Ruth Anne referred to Stephen Lewis's very positive speech (February 14, 2005) on his recent visit to Zambia:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With the help of Global Fund on AIDS, Zambia is going to make antiretroviral AIDS drugs available free to affected Zambians! By end of 2005, 100,000 people will have access to ARV drugs. • The World Food Program purchased and distributed much of the recent crop produced in Zambia after rains came to relieve drought. • All levels from President, to bureaucrats, to local workers, are well informed and genuinely committed to carrying out necessary work to deal with the HIV/AIDS epidemic. (Speech issued by "Office of the UN Special Envoy for HIV/AIDS Africa" -20 copies at Presbytery)
United Church Petitions	<p>The success of the United Church petition of Hope signed by 40,000 is reflected on the UCC website::</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government responded, including debt moratoriums and cancellations for some "Heavily Indebted Poor Countries" and for bilateral debt in 24 African countries. Canada also doubled Global Fund contributions for Development Assistance. • The Government passed Bill C-9 to enable the production of cheaper generic antiretroviral drugs for distribution in countries like Zambia <p>Further actions needed were discussed in question time:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fedl Gov't needs to press other G7 countries to also relieve great debt-loads of poor countries • Federal government needs to follow-up on Bill C-9 to ensure that loop holes still apparently preventing generic drug production are addressed urgently.

What was Learned from the Visit?

Our 'connected-ness' to Zambians	<p>Operating in Partnership with Zambians is the best, most sustainable approach:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "I saw astute, clever people, using creativity to find solutions that fit a Zambian context." • There is an enormous volunteer cadre: caring for the ill, training, counseling, leadership. • They do need our resources and help changing world institutions that impose poverty. • "Despite the burden of loss, sadness and poverty, they can celebrate, sing and dance." • Visiting w/o monetary gift-giving, cast the visitors and Zambians in partnership equality: an epiphany of deep connectedness arose when the UCC poster "The World Has AIDS" was shared – a ripple of response seemed to say "We are not in this alone". Quoting Corinthians "If one part of the body suffers all other parts suffer with it." brought further response affirming this sense of connectedness.
We do make a difference	<p>Given successes in shaping our own Government policy toward debt, the effectiveness of our partners' work using our resources and the fact that Zambians want to know we are with them, WE DO MAKE A DIFFERENCE!!!</p>