

## Meet a Zimbabwean schoolboy!



My name is Andson. I am 11 years old. I live in the Matopas in Zimbabwe in southern Africa. **My school is Fort Usher Primary.**

I am from a Child Headed Home, which means I have no parents. They both died of AIDS. Now I am the head of my family. My younger brother and sister depend on me to take care of them. Our grandmother is our guardian, but she is quite old and is not able to work.

Every day I wake at 5.30. I do some jobs at home and then walk for an hour to get to school. This is difficult, especially in winter time (June and July).

School starts at 7.00. There are 33 children in my class. We do subjects such as English, Maths and Ndebele (our local language). At break-time we play games in the yard like football.

At the moment we don't have money to buy bread so we don't bring a packed lunch to school. We don't have breakfast at home. If we made porridge we'd be late for school. It takes too long to get a fire going and to boil water before we leave for school. We eat our meal of the day in the evening.



Without our school breakfasts we'd be hungry all day. That makes it very hard to stay awake and keep listening to our teacher.

## £2.10 pays for one term's hot breakfasts for one child in Zimbabwe!

### What's for breakfast?

In rural areas, like Andson's homeplace, lots of food items aren't available, like fruit or cereals or milk or bread or butter or cheese or ham or yogurt or whatever it is you have for breakfast! So what do children have for breakfast?

### Good news!

ACET's Community Care Programme and the local community work together to serve porridge for breakfast every morning at break-time to 2,500 children in 7 primary schools.



Schoolchildren enjoying their porridge

Porridge is made from **mealie meal**. This is a coarse flour from ground corn kernels (maize). It is cooked over a wood fire in a BIG pot. For faster cooking, add more wood to the fire!

Here's what goes into each day's porridge:

- 15 kg mealie meal
- 3 kg sugar
- 2 bottles peanut butter **or**
- 1 bottle cooking oil
- 500g salt water

The cooks use long wooden paddles to stir the mixture!

It's the same every single day.

And all the children eat every drop of it!

Even those who have no spoon, and use their fingers!



### **When does school end?**

At 1 p.m. After the walk home, Andson and his family have work to do!

### **What's involved in running a household?**

#### **Water**

Andson's home doesn't have running water or a river nearby. It has no sink or bath or washing machine. The toilet is a pit latrine which is a deep hole.

Someone has to walk to the nearest well to collect the day's water. One child may not be strong enough to carry enough water so 2 may go and carry a container of about 10 litres each, often on their heads. This can be a very long walk, several kilometres, farther than most of you have come to school!

The family needs water to cook dinner, wash the dishes, the clothes and themselves.



Unless the water comes from a deep well, it is not very clean and may carry diseases. It's better to boil it before you drink it or it can make you sick, but not everyone is able to do this. You'd need to have 2 pots, one to keep boiled water in and one for cooking, and some families don't have 2.

## Collecting firewood

Can you imagine your home without electricity? No fridge/freezer, no TV, no Hoover, no iron or hairdryer or microwave or computer or sound system. What else?

Is your cooker electric? Andson's family collect branches of trees in the scrub around the homestead. 2 or 3 good branches will burn slowly for a long time. The fire is inside the hut, which makes it very smoky, but keeps it a bit warmer on winter nights!



## Washing clothes

Andson and his sister, Thembi (pronounced "Tembi") wash the clothes by hand with a bar of hard soap which they rub into the clothes in a metal basin. Most of the year it's easy to get the clothes dry. Half an hour in the sun will dry anything!

Left: see the metal washtub and the buckets for collecting water

## Cooking dinner

Andson has a metal stand with 3 legs, like the one below, which he puts over the centre of the wood fire, and then sits a pot on top with some water in it to boil. It takes quite a while! Then he mixes in some mealie meal to make **sadza**.

Sadza is a thicker version of the porridge he had for breakfast, minus the peanut butter and sugar. When times are good there is sauce to have with the sadza. You roll up a small ball of sadza in your hand and dip it in the sauce. Sauce could be made from kapenta (tiny dried fish), or from tomatoes, or chopped greens, but all these have to be bought from the shop near school, when they are in stock.

Left: Dinner cooking over a wood fire in a home



### Bedtime

One other thing your home doesn't have if there's no electricity is light bulbs! So when it gets dark Andson and his brother and sister go to bed. If they had some income they could buy candles or an oil lamp, but these are luxuries well outside their reach.

### Food packs

Every 3 months each of the children in Andson's family and the other child headed homes gets a food pack from Willard and CCP. It has mealie meal, salt, sugar, oil, either soya chunks or kapenta, and a long bar of soap. Andson has no money to buy anything since his parents became too sick to work.



Left and below: children from Child Headed Homes collecting their food packs



## Sweeping the compound



Each homestead is fenced in with wire or with thorny branches woven together to keep out leopards. The Matopas, where Andson lives, have the highest density of leopards in the world! Leopards can prowl around at night when there is no one awake to chase them off!

Someone in the family - it can be quite a young child - must sweep the compound to keep it clear of fallen leaves where snakes and scorpions could hide. Their bites or stings are poisonous and could kill one of the children. A snake would also kill the chicks if the family had hens! The brush is made from a bundle of long, strong, dried grass, tightly tied together at the top.



A well-cared for homestead. From left: sleeping hut, living room, granary, cooking hut with space for smoke to escape between the wall and the thatch. Elephant grass cut nearby is used for thatch. Some cooking is done outdoors. The stone hill behind this homestead has a cave in it which a leopard uses as a home from time to time!

### **Why would anyone walk for an hour to get to school? Would you?!**

Zimbabwe is in big trouble economically these days and only a few people have jobs. Lots of people travel to the countries around Zimbabwe: Botswana, South Africa, even Namibia, looking for work. It's much easier to get work if you can read and write, are good at Maths, and can speak English. So to have hope for the future, it's really important to learn as much as you can at school. For Andson this is especially important as his younger brother and sister will still be depending on him to share what he earns with them until they get work themselves.



**School fees** Many children whose parents have died from AIDS aren't able to go to school anymore because they have no money to pay the school fees. (School isn't free.) This is a huge problem: in Zimbabwe it's considered as a disaster for the children. ACET has been able to pay school fees this school year for about 70 orphans to get them back to school, so they can finish their education.

### **hungry?**

When we miss out on a meal we get rumblings in our insides, telling us they're empty, and want food. If you're hungry everyday, you have those pains, and some other problems too. It's hard to stay warm, hard to concentrate, and when you've gone for months without a good diet, your skin gets very dry. Cuts and scrapes take longer to heal, and you just don't feel too good. Small jobs feel like big tasks.

### **What time do you get up? Why does Andson get up so early?**

Before he leaves home at 6 a.m. for the walk to school with his brother and sister, he has to get washed and dressed himself and help the youngest, too. Also he has to make sure the fire has enough wood to keep lit while he's at school, but not enough to set fire to the hut.

### **Are there other children whose lives are like Andson's?**

In the small "village" where Andson lives there are 22 children who live in Child Headed Homes, and another 46 orphans. His primary school, Fort Usher, has 337 pupils from 2 villages.

### **How hot does it get in the Matopas?**

Before the rains start, it can be up to the high 30s Centigrade or low 40s!!! Roasting! But the winter nights get really cold, down as far as 5 or 6 degrees C! (NB Remember Zimbabwe is in the southern hemisphere so the winter is in June and July.) Mostly homes are built to let out heat, because winter only lasts 2 months and the rest of the year is hot. This is a real problem for families like Andson's because they have no way of buying clothes, and children grow fast. The day we met Andson in July, it was a cold mid-winter's day and he had no shoes and socks and no jumper.



The bump under the blanket is a mother who was very sick with AIDS. Her children were sitting watching minded by their granny, "Gogo". She became their guardian when their mother died.

People love to decorate their homes by painting patterns on the walls or around the windows outside and inside.

### Ndebele Culture

When an Ndebele person wants to hand you something they use both hands, with one hand holding the wrist of the other. When they want to welcome you or thank you, they clap. Music and dance are very important in Ndebele culture. In songs there is a leader who sings out a line, and everyone else sings a response in harmony.



Crafts made by villagers who belong to Support Groups for people living with HIV. They want to sell their crafts to earn some money, but have few customers.



### Quiz:

1. Which country is Andson from?
2. What is a child headed home?
3. What is breakfast made from?
4. Which crop/plant is used to make mealie meal?
5. List 2 things that Andson has to collect everyday to keep his home running.
6. Can you remember the name of the food eaten for dinner?
7. What time does school start?
8. Why is there a fence around each homestead?
9. What time is bedtime?
10. How much does a breakfast cost?

### Answers:

1. Zimbabwe
2. A home where the parents have died of AIDS and the oldest child is in charge of the family
3. Mealie meal, oil, water, sugar, salt and peanut butter
4. Maize
5. Water and firewood
6. Sadza
7. 7 a.m.
8. To keep out leopards!
9. Once it gets dark, as there are no lights
11. About 3 pence



Zimbabweans tell a joke: A boy asks his Dad, "Dad, what did we have for transport before we had donkey carts?" "Buses, son!" is the Dad's reply.

One way you can help is to save **3 pence** at a time!  
Each 3p will buy a breakfast for someone your age in Zimbabwe. They'll never meet you, but you'll have made a difference in their life!

For older classes:

### **What is AIDS?**

AIDS stands for Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. It is caused by a virus called HIV. The virus damages a person's immune system so that his or her body can't fight other germs, and so he or she gets sick and eventually dies.

An adult with AIDS needs 20-30% more food than a healthy person. A child born with HIV needs almost double the level of nutrition of a child who is AIDS free. (World Health Organisation, [www.who.int](http://www.who.int)) In areas of the world with food shortages people who are sick with AIDS become terribly thin.

In the developed world HIV no longer kills people because they can take medicine called Anti Retroviral Therapy (ART) which can fight HIV. These drugs are not a cure. What they do is reduce the quantity of the virus in a person, until the amount is small enough for a person to live in quite good health. In rural areas ART has only become available recently, and only if a sick person manages to reach a hospital which is dispensing the medicine. One side-effect of ART is that if you take it on an empty stomach it makes you feel sick.

Paying for transport to the regional hospital (about 60 km away) is too expensive for people who live on less than \$2 a day. While people with HIV are still well enough to work, they spend money on antibiotics for the early infections they catch, but once they are too sick to earn, their money is gone. The Community Care Programme provides transport every Thursday to the hospital, shared between 11 villages, so that all patients have access each month to treatment.

People who aren't able to get the medication die slow, painful deaths from diseases like TB, after catching all sorts of colds and flus. Sadly even family members who are HIV-free can catch TB from living in close quarters with someone with TB who is coughing a lot.



### **Practise your Ndebele!**

Here's a couple of hints:

- each syllable has the same emphasis
- when a "h" comes after a consonant it does the opposite to English: it makes the consonant harder, not softer. So "th" is a "t" sound. "Ph" is a "p".

Salibonani, linjani? - Hello, how are you?

Siyabonga - Thank you

Uya ngaphi? - Where are you going?

Ngiyathanda ukudla isinkwa - I like to eat bread

Ngiyasiza umama - I am helping my mother

Ngifuna ukubona umngane - I want to see my friend

Ufuna ukufunda, angithi? - You want to learn don't you?

Ngomile - I am thirsty!

Ngiphuzile - I am late!



Zimbabwe is the dull red country, touching green South Africa, pink Mozambique, blue Zambia.

Zimbabwe is in the southern hemisphere, just above the Tropic of Capricorn, so it's winter there during our summer holidays. Most of the year there is no rain! "The rains" are usually between October and February, but the last few years there has been a drought, and there has been almost no rain, so no harvests.

2012 has brought the worst drought for 20 years. In an area in the southeast corner of Zimbabwe it only rained twice in the rainy season of 2011, with the second rain on 24 December 2011. The next rains are not expected until October 2012. Many cattle, donkeys and goats are dying of hunger at the moment because there is nothing left for them to eat.

### **Zimbabwe country profile:**

**Population:** about 12,500,000, in a land-locked country. Arable land: 8.23%.

**Area:** 390,757 sq. km (150,872 sq. miles, compared to the UK, at 93,000 sq. miles)

At least **1 million adults** and **200,000 children** are living with HIV (UNAIDS)

Under 5 mortality: **80** per 1000 births (no. of children who die before age 5, UNICEF)

Life expectancy at birth: **50 years** (2010, UNICEF)

AIDS orphans: approx. **1.5 million**

21% of all children have lost one or both parents in the villages with the school breakfast programme

GNI per capita (average annual income of a citizen) = **\$460**, compared to \$38,540 for the UK

