Visitors from Zimbabwe

A preliminary study outlining the risks and vulnerabilities facing Zimbabwean children who have crossed illegally into Mozambique
1.0 Introduction

The movement of people across political boundaries has generated considerable debate in Southern Africa. Save the Children UK in Mozambique has determined the issue of cross border migration of children as a priority area for research and possible programming. In late 2005, SC UK conducted a preliminary study with a view to gaining a better understanding of the general situation and specific risks and vulnerabilities facing Zimbabwean children living in Manica Province in central Mozambique. While further research is required, SC UK spoke with a limited number of provincial and district government officials, civil society organisations and people in the private sector to gain some insight into this little known phenomena. Based on these interviews, particularly of NGOs operating in the area, SC UK is concerned about Zimbabwean children experiencing neglect, abuse and exploitation in Mozambique due to a number of factors, and that government, civil society and community dialogue and interventions are needed to improve their situation. The following are some key points which arose out of the preliminary study.

1.1 Summary of Key Points

Due to the illegality of cross border movement of many Zimbabweans into Mozambique, the porous nature of the border between the two countries, the difficulty in identifying Zimbabwean children, and the fact that many stay for short periods before returning home, the number of Zimbabwean children currently in Mozambique is difficult to establish. In addition, the national and Manica provincial governments do not consider the illegal entry and status of Zimbabweans to be a major issue for concern which partly explains why so little data is available.

While it is clear that the numbers of Zimbabweans, both adults and children, crossing into Mozambique are significantly less than the illegal movement of Zimbabwean children into South Africa and Botswana, there are indications that this issue merits further investigation. One district government official claimed a movement of 10-15 children per day crossing the border illegally, while several civil society organisations in Manica are concerned about an increase in Zimbabwean girls entering into prostitution.

Economic insecurity, lack of employment opportunities, political frustration, natural disasters such as drought and prolonged sickness and death of family members, sometimes from AIDS, are some of the factors prompting Zimbabwean children to enter into Mozambique.

The difficulties that Zimbabwean children face in Mozambique due to their illegal status include: labour exploitation, lack of protection due to inadequate documentation, limited access to schools and other social welfare institutions, coercion of girls into the sex industry as the only means of economic survival, discrimination, and harassment by the authorities on both sides of the border.
2.0 Background

Mozambique and Zimbabwe have traditionally strong political, economic and social ties. There is a long history of cross border relations and trade along the massive 1,231 kilometre frontier, particularly involving residents living closest to the border region. Historically, people travelled to either country with a view to engaging in commercial and agricultural activities, and searching for employment when local jobs became scarce. Some married and established families on the other side. In fact, it is often difficult to differentiate between Mozambicans and Zimbabweans who live close to the border because some share indigenous languages, traditions and culture, and family ties. Today, for example, those living in close proximity to the border in either country will cross to purchase items such as firewood and bread, and return soon after. During the war in Mozambique, which lasted over fifteen years, the crossings were mostly one-way. Thousands of refugees, including children, entered Zimbabwe. Many of them remained for the duration of the armed conflict and began new lives in their host country. The majority subsequently returned after the peace agreement was signed in 1992 to reunite with separated family members as security was restored, and reconstruction and rehabilitation of the country gained momentum.

Since the late nineties, there has been increased instability in Zimbabwe and an overall collapse of the economy. Many of its people currently suffer from food insecurity, which is largely attributable to a drastic decrease in local agricultural production and natural disasters such as drought. There is a current unemployment rate estimated at between 70% and 80%.\(^1\) Political and economic institutions have weakened and collapsed. Social services, including health care and education programmes, have been severely degraded. In 2005, the HIV/AIDS infection rate was 24.6% among the adult population – one of the highest in Sub-Saharan Africa. As a result, many Zimbabweans have left the country, some acquiring work visas in neighbouring countries and traveling through official exit ports, and others have left illegally, in search of better lives.

The preferred destinations are South Africa and Botswana. This is due to the existence of more work opportunities, and stronger currencies than that of their home country. Some economic migrants and refugees, including children, have managed to find jobs in agriculture, construction on large development projects and working in the informal sector. However, in many cases Zimbabweans who illegally enter into South Africa and other nearby countries find themselves in precarious and dangerous circumstances. The ‘border violators’ or ‘border hoppers’\(^2\) as they are called also face the possibility of repatriation to Zimbabwe. Currently, about 2000 illegal Zimbabweans are repatriated to South Africa every week.\(^3\) Approximately 15% of those are said to be children. This situation has become critical for women and children who are most susceptible to abuse and exploitation.

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2.1 Zimbabweans in Mozambique

The influx of Zimbabweans into South Africa has been a topic of concern and debate in various regional and international fora, and in the media. It has prompted some research from development, humanitarian, human rights, security and international legal perspectives. Some subsequent interventions have been created in order to respond to problems associated with this cross border phenomena. For example, a centre at the Beitbridge border sponsored by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and South African and Zimbabwean governments will open soon to help deportees with food rations, transportation, basic healthcare and information on human trafficking and migration, on a voluntary basis. There will also be a child reception centre to provide assistance for children without parents.

A topic which has received considerably less attention is the movement of Zimbabweans, including children, across the border into central Mozambique. SC UK identified a need to initiate research with a view to better understand the risks and vulnerabilities facing these children, and be in a more informed position to assess whether interventions are necessary. Preliminary findings have shown that some of them are orphaned and vulnerable children who voluntarily and involuntarily move across the border into Mozambique. They often experience basic violations of their human rights in already impoverished communities in Manica, Tete, Gaza and Sofala provinces. Partly due to their illegal status, these children have insufficient access to food, schooling, health care and support, and are susceptible to various forms of abuse and exploitation in the form of child prostitution and labour. In some cases, girls and young women have left Zimbabwe in search of job opportunities to support their families and ended up as sex workers.

3.0 Limitations of the study

Very little research has been conducted on the presence and situation of Zimbabweans, whether adults or children, living and working illegally in Mozambique. A provincial social welfare government official acknowledged that to his knowledge this was the first time a study of this nature had been commissioned. In light of political sensitivities surrounding this topic and a reluctance of Zimbabweans in Manica Province to be interviewed out of fear of deportation, compiling quantitative data has been a challenge. According to a researcher, there is also a difficulty in identifying Zimbabweans in Manica. Some estimates indicate only several hundred Zimbabwean children living in Mozambique, while other sources estimate between ten and fifteen crossing per day into this country.

The researcher also referred to a limited number of written sources such as magazine and newspaper articles, and reports written by consultants. It is important to highlight the insufficiency of written information related to this issue.

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4 It is important to note the distinction between child migration and child trafficking. Child migration is a broader issue than the classical definition of trafficking although they can be interrelated problems. Child trafficking has received more regional and international attention than migration.
4.0 Where was the study carried out?

The research was carried out in the towns of Chimoio and Manica in Manica Province in central Mozambique. The Administrative Posts (Posto Administrativo) of Inciope and Machipanda were also targeted sites of research. Several provincial government officials and civil society representatives operating in the area provided insight into the situation of Zimbabwean children in Manica Province.

5.0 The Mozambique-Zimbabwe border

There are four main border crossings between Zimbabwe and Mozambique. They are Machipanda and Espungabera in Manica Province, Chicualacuala in Gaza Province and Cuchamano in Tete Province. Machipanda has six border police stations while other crossings are reported to be under resourced and understaffed. In 2003, only 17% of the border was monitored and protected by the authorities on either side. This makes the porous frontier particularly easy for Zimbabweans and Mozambicans, sometimes carrying smuggled goods, to enter and exit at certain points. According to a Manica provincial immigration official, there are between 2,000 and 3,000 people crossing the border in both directions every day, a considerable number of whom are children.

6.0 Why do Zimbabwean children come to Mozambique?

The major reasons Zimbabwean children cross the border into Mozambique and other neighbouring Southern African countries have to do with escaping poverty and hunger at home. They tend to be among the poorest and most vulnerable children in Zimbabwe. Sometimes they cross legally with their parents carrying proper identification, and other times they cross over the border alone or with young companions. In some cases, they will cross the border to find parents and other family members who are already working in Mozambique. They are involved in a variety of jobs to earn higher wages and are paid in stronger currencies than the Zimbabwe dollar (ZD), although they tend to make less than Mozambicans and are not protected by national labour legislation.
Many of these children have little choice but to find work opportunities outside of Zimbabwe following the death of parents and caregivers. In some cases, orphaned children have lost family members due to HIV/AIDS and other diseases and have little or no means of support. Other children are victims of unstable, abusive home environments and decide to flee their situations.

There is also pressure on children from their parents to seek employment in Mozambique because of a lack of money and jobs to support their families at home. A child can make money in Mozambique by selling basic goods in markets, harvesting crops, or selling firewood. Often, the child will in turn bring a percentage of his or her earnings back home. Zimbabwean children have a keen and persistent sense of responsibility to help their families in any way they can at a time when it is difficult for them to find ways of affording and accessing food in their country.

### 6.1 Zimbabwean adults in Mozambique

Individual and small groups of men and women also cross the border in search of work. Zimbabwean cross-border traders, mostly women, also come to Mozambique to purchase and bring home second-hand clothing and goods for resale. Some have valid work permits and identification while others cross the border illegally. Zimbabwean adults who find employment in Mozambique can work Monday to Friday, often in agriculture, and then return home to their families for the weekend. Others arrive and depart on a daily basis because they cannot leave their properties unattended for extended periods for fear their homes and assets will be seized by neighbours. There are also said to be Zimbabweans teaching English language in neighbouring Sofala Province schools.

It also important to note the presence of a small number of white Zimbabweans who are involved in large-scale farming and entrepreneurial activities in Mozambique. According to Justice for Agriculture, a non-governmental organisation based in Harare, 35-45 farmers have settled in Mozambique. They began to arrive in central Mozambique to explore tobacco growing potential following the collapse of the commercial farming sector. White Zimbabweans tend to have valid work permits and have access to money, resources and support. The government of Mozambique recognizes them as an asset to the economy in terms of expertise in agriculture and providing jobs to Mozambicans. A provincial government agriculture official talked about the importance of having Zimbabwean farmers in Mozambique:

> It is important for Mozambique to have Zimbabwean farmers here. They have important knowledge and watering equipment. They are able to explore our agricultural potential. Workers also benefit in terms of jobs. This is a gain for the country – the Mozambican farming sector has started having some potential because they are trained by Zimbabwean farmers.

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7.0 Risk and vulnerabilities of Zimbabwean children in Mozambique

7.1 Child prostitution

Some Zimbabwean girls and young women are involved in prostitution in Mozambique. This mainly occurs along the Beira Corridor between the port and the Zimbabwean border. More specifically, their involvement in the sex trade occurs in Inchope, Caia, Machipanda, Manica, Vanduzi, Chibavava, Dondo, Gorongosa and Chimoio. They are sometimes present in transit areas such as truck stops and at the site of large construction projects where large numbers of workers are found. In Manica Province, Zimbabwean prostitutes will often live with seven or more people (not all of whom are necessarily involved in the sex trade) in small, rudimentary apartments. They are subject to arbitrary rent increases by landlords and unable to register complaints because of their illegal status. Some of them are single while others have husbands in Zimbabwe.

The existence of Zimbabwean sex workers is not limited to Manica Province. In a recent SC UK study on the abuse and exploitation of children in Caia and Chimuaara in central Mozambique, a group of youths pointed to the presence of Zimbabwean girl prostitutes in the commercial settlements along the Zambezi River. Zimbabwean girls as young as twelve are said to be providing sex services for small sums of money to truck drivers and other motorists. In Manica Province, Zimbabwean sex workers, some of whom are said to be under 18 years of age, are less expensive than Mozambican prostitutes. However, they are able to earn more money in the sex trade than working in the informal sector. An Administrative Post government official in Machipanda explained that,

Many Mozambican men tend to be sexually involved with Zimbabweans because they say they are cheaper. With 30 to 40 thousand Meticais (just over USD1), it is possible to have an afternoon or a night of pleasure.

As is the case with many Mozambican sex workers, Zimbabwean prostitutes are seldom able to negotiate condom use with their clients, making them more susceptible to HIV infection.

Some of these girls in Manica come to Mozambique and return to their country in the same day. One official explained that there is no co-ordinated action towards preventing prostitution:

This is an existing problem and currently there are no administrative measures for it. They said that poverty pushes them to prostitution and they come here for it. We try only to control the situation through the provision of day hospitals and preliminary treatment of HIV/AIDS, and dissemination of HIV/AIDS messages trying to remind them that this practice is not a way to survive. Our main concern is not prostitution but border control and putting up fencing.

Civil society organisations in the area are more concerned about the presence of Zimbabwean prostitutes than the government officials who were interviewed, though they

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7 “A Bridge Across the Zambezi: What needs to be done for children.” Save the Children UK and Save the Children Norway. March 2006. Maputo.
do not have any specific projects to assist these girls and young women. Organisations such as Magariro, Omes Omes, Anda Manica and Kabatsirana told Save the Children UK the number of Zimbabwean children working as prostitutes is growing. They claim that the social and economic situation of Zimbabwean girls lead them into a life of prostitution in Mozambique. Some of these children do not live with their parents and others are orphans. They are susceptible to physical injuries and psychological trauma, and prone to sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV/AIDS. There are also reports of confrontations between Mozambican and Zimbabwean prostitutes. Mozambican sex workers feel their livelihoods are threatened because foreign girls offer less expensive sexual services.

7.2 Child labour

7.2.1 Children working in agriculture

Some Zimbabwean families are illegally cultivating land and raising livestock in Manica Province, particularly in Mossurize District. As an administrative post official in Machipanda described in January 2006:

In the last few years, we had two big groups of Zimbabweans move to Mossurize. The first group had about 120 to 130 families. The second had 120 families with uncountable numbers of children.

An official from the Zimbabwean Ministry of Social Welfare informed SC UK that,

In 2003, several Zimbabwean families looking for fertile land established themselves in the border community of China Txove in Machipanda. Also the people of Nhamparana in Zimbabwe cultivate in Mozambique. Children often assist their families by working in the fields.

Children who are unaccompanied by families will also approach farmers on their own and ask for jobs. In SC UK’s interviews with Mozambican farmers, they refused to admit they were hiring Zimbabweans, either adults or children, as workers in the fields. They insisted their workers were all Mozambican. However, the provincial government is aware that Zimbabwean children work illegally in agriculture in Manica. A boy can earn up to 900,000 Meticais (about USD33) per month working long hours as a farm labourer or taking care of livestock.

A provincial government labour official indicated some of the problems that Zimbabwean children face when employed by farmers:

During the harvest season, many young Zimbabweans come to the farms in search of work. Nobody knows exactly how many there are. They claim to be Mozambicans even if they cannot speak Portuguese. The government knows they are from Zimbabwe, but the farmers who employ them do not distinguish between Mozambican and Zimbabwean because it is not in their interest to do so. Many farmers try to avoid labour law requirements. They prefer to hire Zimbabweans because they are cheap. A farmer must at least pay a Mozambican the minimum wage. Mozambican labourers also have access to labour unions who can protect their rights and Zimbabweans are unprotected.
7.2.2 Children involved in other types of work

Zimbabweans, including children are also involved in other forms of work in Mozambique. These include working in construction, collecting and selling livestock, serving food and drinks in drinking establishments (barracas), selling products in vending stalls in market areas and in the street, domestic work and working in restaurants. They are recognised by Mozambican employers as being cheap compared to what they are required to pay Mozambicans under national labour laws. Restaurant owners sometimes employ Zimbabweans as a status symbol because English speaking staff impress customers and can attract more business. Zimbabwean girls earn money selling bed sheets, clothing, and other products which they bring with them by bus from Zimbabwe. In Manica Province, Zimbabweans are often hired as bricklayers but SC UK could not determine whether any of them are children.

Some Zimbabweans also illegally pan for gold along the border in Mozambique. In March 2006, about 30 panners were killed by heavy rains and mudslides which flooded caves where they were staying in Chimaninmani and Chipinge districts. Some of the estimated three hundred panners were affected by the flooding of the Msapa river and some may have died of malaria and pneumonia. There are unconfirmed reports that up to fifty people could have died.\(^8\) SC UK could not determine whether any of the casualties were children.

Zimbabwean boys and men have been accused of making money from cattle rustling across the border, and smuggling clothing and fuel into Zimbabwe.

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7.3 Children without identification (ID)

There are Zimbabwean children in Mozambique who do not have recognised nationalities because of a lack of identification such as passports and birth certificates. A provincial government official from the Ministry of Women and Social Welfare explained that:

*This is a worrying issue mainly related to HIV/AIDS orphaned children who do not have identification, and do not know if they are Mozambican or Zimbabwean. There are children who speak English, Portuguese and Shona but they do not have any ID. The issue of identification is a great concern. Another contributing factor to this situation is that the Office for Registration Services for Civil Identification is only present in the district headquarters and people living in communities cannot easily go there.*

The weakness of civil identification and the difficulty of identifying Mozambicans and Zimbabweans in Manica Province is problematic. The lack of birth registration can be a contributing factor in child trafficking, which is a growing issue in Mozambique. The absence of identification causes children to be unprotected in both countries, and can subject them to various abuse and injustices. However, the fact that Zimbabwean children often do not have ID may not prevent some from getting access to health care. A provincial government official told SC UK that, “There is no segregation of any kind. In the local hospital nobody asks for ID and children are provided with treatment.”

The issue of Zimbabwean children without identification requires further investigation in order to gain a better understanding of how this increases their vulnerability in Mozambique.

7.4 Children and access to social services

Though the government official quoted above claims that Zimbabwean children have access to health care, there is a difficulty for them in accessing schools in Manica province. Existing schools in Manica are often at or over capacity with Mozambican students. Where a school has been established in an area, priority for enrolment is for Mozambican students. In some cases, there is no schooling available whatever, such as in the border area of Serra Choa in Catandica. Mozambican parents, usually public officers and business people, living in this area sometimes send their children to hospitals and schools across the border in Zimbabwe. For Zimbabwean children who are enrolled in school in Manica, it is challenging to study in the Portuguese language, which can ultimately discourage them from attending school.

In Districts such as Mossurize in Manica Province, the hospitals are located in Zimbabwe. In some cases, the Zimbabwe side has access to electricity where the Mozambican side does not so Mozambicans will cross the border to receive medical treatment which requires electrical power.

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9 There is still a need for further research to better understand Zimbabwean children’s access to health care in Mozambique.
7.5 Children at border crossings

For the most part, the national and Manica provincial governments do not seem overly concerned about Zimbabweans crossing the border into Mozambique. Repatriations to Zimbabwe are very rare. One provincial government official explained to SC UK that there is an understanding that Zimbabwe is in a state of crisis and that its citizens crossing into Mozambique is inevitable. Despite the fact that Zimbabwean border authorities are much stricter with entry requirements for Mozambicans, he added that in general repatriation was not a viable option because migrants would simply return a few days later to escape difficult conditions at home.

In rare cases, when the Manica provincial government identifies a child as being Zimbabwean, he or she can be repatriated to Zimbabwe. Another provincial government official explained that,

*When we realise these children are Zimbabwean we sometimes take them for repatriation because we think that this is the correct thing to do. If the child is Zimbabwean, he/she must be reintegrated in the family back home.*

The official did not refer to orphans and vulnerable children who do not necessarily have families to return back home to.

Though repatriations of Zimbabweans living and working in Mozambique are rare, there are instances where this has occurred. In early May of this year, the Mozambican police in collaboration with their Zimbabwean counterparts, repatriated a group of 72 gold panners who were prospecting illegally in a remote and difficult to access region of Manica Province.¹⁰

8.0 Preliminary recommendations

Save the Children UK has determined that more research, specific interventions in the areas of protection and care and support, and national and regional networking are required to help ensure that Zimbabwean children are protected and their well-being promoted in Mozambique. The following is a list of recommendations to be considered.

8.1 Information

- An important priority should be the identification and interviewing of Zimbabwean children to better understand the risks, vulnerabilities and deprivations that they face in Mozambique. For example, further information is required on their access or lack of access to food, schooling, health care and other basic services. Adult Zimbabweans should also be interviewed in order to gain insight into their situation, and that of children of whom they may be parents or guardians.

• The situation of Zimbabwean children in Manica cannot be seen in isolation from the other provinces where they are also said to be found. Further research into the situation of Zimbabwean children in Tete, Gaza and Sofala provinces is needed in order to be able to create more comprehensive and effective interventions that promote and protect the rights of these children in Mozambique.

• Although the researcher consulted a limited number of written sources of information such as articles and reports, a more thorough desk research should be done. For example, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), Institute for Security Studies in Pretoria and southern African regional networks may have further information.

8.2 Protection

• According to the findings of this study, there are no children’s rights or protection organizations that provide services aimed specifically at Zimbabwean children living illegally in Mozambique. Government and civil society partners need to become more aware of the situation of these children in Mozambique, and should be supported in providing services to those who need it.

• A focal point should be assigned who is tasked with coordinating and monitoring the efforts of different actors (government, non-government and community actors, etc.) in order to assist with the support and follow up of Zimbabwean child migrants in the country.

• Border authority officials and police forces should be provided with additional training or refresher courses on rights, laws and enforcement relating to child abuse, exploitation and prostitution. Awareness raising and training materials for border officials, police, health and social welfare officers who are in contact with Zimbabwean children in Manica should be developed.

• In light of evidence suggesting that some Zimbabwean girls and women are involved in the sex trade and that they are more susceptible to sexual abuse and exploitation due to their circumstances, the police in Manica Province should investigate any allegations of abuse based on reports made by the children or their family members irrespective of their legal or illegal status.

• In terms of reducing child labour in bars, restaurants and barracas in Manica Province and other provinces where Zimbabwean children are found, owners should be discouraged from giving them work. If children are employed, they should be given work that is not hazardous, does not require them to work long hours, especially at night, and does not coerce them into prostitution.
There is a need for community outreach in Manica Province where Zimbabwean children are found in terms of absorbing and caring for those who are orphaned and without guardians to protect them. There is also a need to do grass roots sensitisation to let communities (e.g. churches, health clinics, parents) better understand the realities of children living in Zimbabwe.

8.3 Care and Support

Zimbabwean children living in Manica Province are exposed to negative forms of entertainment, particularly those frequenting and working in bars, discos and restaurants at night. The creation of spaces, resources and activities (e.g. community centres or football pitches) where these children could play and learn would provide them with a positive alternative to spending time in these establishments.

8.4 National, Regional and International Networking

Advocacy organisations such as Rede Came (National Network on Preventing Child Abuse) at the national level can play an important role in bringing the issue of risks and vulnerabilities of Zimbabwean children to the attention of the Mozambican government and relevant child-focused civil society organizations. Rede Came in collaboration with SC UK should devise strategies for disseminating this information.

At the regional level, the Southern African Network against the Trafficking and Abuse of Children (SANTAC) can play an important role in stimulating dialogue about this issue with its member organizations. The Zimbabwe-Mozambique Friendship Association (ZIMOFA), which supported many Mozambican refugees in Zimbabwe during the war, could also play a role in this discussion. SC UK and its partners also need to engage with organisations like the African Commission on Human and Peoples Rights and the Southern Africa Development Committee (SADC), and promote a wider debate around child migration in southern Africa and protection of their rights.
**9.0 Endnotes and Other Reference Materials**


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