

Zimbabwe October 2008 – Report by Keith Lindsey

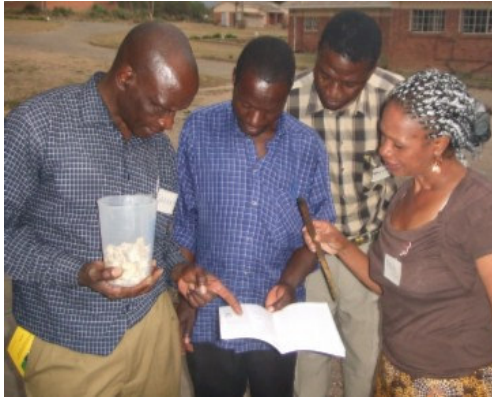
Tragically, Zimbabwe is a country on the verge of collapse. Starvation stares hundreds of thousands in the face. Every day many, maybe even hundreds, of people die, simply because food and medical care are no longer available. The state health and education services scarcely function any more. Many hospitals lack food and even the most basic medicines; during power cuts at night they lack even candles to provide emergency lighting. Teachers are on strike because their pay is not even enough to pay their bus fare to work.

Meanwhile a “privileged” minority take advantage of the inflation rate which is estimated to be in the trillions per cent by buying USD at the official rate and then selling at the black market rate – as evidenced by the expensive new homes being built in Harare and the large number of brand new Mercedes cars. The majority have to join long queues in the towns to take a paltry sum out of the bank, scarcely enough to buy a loaf of bread. In the rural areas they face the oncoming rainy season with no seeds to plant and no fertiliser.



The participants in seminar 1

Some years ago Zimbabwe was a bread-basket, exporting wheat and maize to the surrounding countries. Today the situation has been completely reversed. The lucky ones receive money from relatives who live abroad and travel to Zambia, Botswana, South Africa or Mozambique to buy food. The unlucky ones have absolutely no resources.



Participants check the “Seminar Handbook” as they prepare chilli ointment for rheumatism

The people are very resilient, they continue to smile and face life with resolute determination in the hope that, one day these hard times will come to an end. There is no rebellion, just patient waiting ...

In this situation, Natural Medicine is a godsend. The “Diocese of Mutare Community Care Programme” (DOMCCP) has already established an excellent programme of Home-based Care in which literally thousands of volunteers in the Province of Manicaland have been trained to establish gardens of medicinal plants and to treat some of the most common, serious conditions such as AIDS, diarrhoea, malaria and skin problems.

Joachim Nyamande is one of the managers of this programme, with special responsibility for Natural Medicine. Joachim arranged the named seminar held in Mutare in 2006. Since

then he attended an named seminar with Hans-Martin Hirt in Malawi in 2007. Earlier this year he was elected the National Membership Chairman of the Zimbabwe AIDS Network (ZAN), in which office he attended the international AIDS conference held in Mexico.

So in October 2008 I was invited by Joachim Nyamande and Sister Eveline, Project Director of DOMCCP, to run two six-day seminars in Mutare, the first for members of DOMCCP from Manicaland, and the second for members of ZAN from all parts of the country.

This was not so easy. No training centre was willing to provide food and accommodation, except at an extremely high price. This was resolved by Joachim making a trip to neighbouring Mozambique to buy all the necessary provisions, including many of our seminar materials.

We planned for 35 participants in each seminar, but in the first seminar we were confronted with 50 eager faces! With just a little sharing of the food and negotiation with the kitchen staff, the seminar went ahead. Following this hectic week, the second seminar was a delight, with only 20



There was great delight in tasting the wonderful rice and bread that were prepared in the solar oven

participants with whom we could explore all subjects at greater depth.

In the seminar leadership, I was joined by Joachem himself and Nelson Moyo, an experienced and very competent named trainer from Malawi. We were also grateful to several experienced and qualified participants who addressed the seminars on such topics as malaria, use of a clinical thermometer, the development of HIV, making a diagnosis and permaculture.

Theoretical sessions included:

- Malaria
- Diarrhoea
- HIV/AIDS
- Wounds
- Skin problems
- Several medicinal plants, especially lemon grass, *Artemisia annua*, *Carica papaya*, *Moringa oleifera*, garlic

Practical sessions and demonstrations included

- the preparation of medicinal oils and ointments, herbal teas, tinctures, black stones, medicinal charcoal and soap.
- fieldwork, which included finding the contours, planting artemisia and other plants, composting, drip irrigation
- cooking rice and baking bread in a solar oven
- the preparation of a nutritious “monkey bread” drink.
- sowing seeds of artemisia, grain amaranth, *Hibiscus sabdariffa* and other plants.



Fieldwork included planting echinacea and lemon grass

Each day commenced with a devotion followed by an evaluation of the previous day. In spite of the very difficult circumstances in which people are living, the seminars were very joyful experiences, and members responded enthusiastically to the challenge of composing their own songs on the theme of Natural Medicine.

A steering committee has been established to manage the formation of “anamed Zimbabwe”, which it is deeply hoped will help in bringing the knowledge and skills of Natural Medicine to many more people throughout the country – and quickly!

In spite of all the difficulties, the seminars were extremely worthwhile. They will help many people to be better nourished and to enjoy better health, in the situation where the formal services of all sorts, health, education, agricultural support, are all at absolute rock bottom.

Joachem Nyamande has challenged his colleagues in the Zimbabwe AIDS Network to prepare a presentation on Natural Medicine and AIDS in readiness for the next international conference, which will be in Vienna in 2010.

I would like to thank Joachem Nyamande, Sister Eveline Murray and Nelson Moyo for their hard work and dedication that made these seminars such a success. May I also express my appreciation to all the various people and organisations that made these seminars possible, especially the Catholic Diocese of Rottenburg in Germany for their major financial support, anamed international for providing books and materials, Steve Riley in Harare for providing artemisia plants and tea, and ICCE in the UK and NewDay Africa in the USA for their donations.



The groups were very enthusiastic, often bursting into song when the subject excited them – as was often the case in practical sessions.

I look forward to being able to visit Zimbabwe again in order to support and encourage the work of “anamed Zimbabwe”. In the meantime, the first local training activities have already been arranged by several different participants from this year’s seminars.