

Supporting Orphaned and Vulnerable Children through Kinship Care

Farm Orphan Support Trust (FOST), Zimbabwe



THE LOCAL CONTEXT

Zimbabwe faces multiple challenges that affect the capacity of families and communities to protect and care for children. The country is home to around 1.5 million orphaned and vulnerable children. About 1 in every 4 has lost one or both of their parents - the majority to HIV and AIDS. Most of these children live in impoverished households headed by grandmothers.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated an already severe economic situation, compounded by drought and residual effects of the 2019 Cyclone Idai. Anecdotal evidence from the Child Protection Working Group (CPWG) shows an increase in child protection violations from the onset of the COVID-19 lockdown.

ABOUT FARM ORPHAN SUPPORT TRUST

FOST was set up in 1997 to support vulnerable children in Zimbabwe, particularly in the farm worker communities. Farming communities lost income and support networks during land redistribution and have limited rights or access to social services.

Through its work to enable community-based protection systems in remote areas, FOST ensures that children can grow up with their siblings in a familiar environment. They provide access to education, vocational and life-skills training, psychosocial support and more.

Find out more: www.familyforeverychild.org/farm-orphans-support-trust or contact Blessing Mutama, Director: blessing@fost.co.zw

THE MODEL

Farm Orphan Support Trust (FOST) runs the Supporting Orphaned and Vulnerable Children programme (known as SOVC) in farming communities at the heart of Zimbabwe. FOST believes that orphaned children have the best opportunity to develop in a family group, without sibling separation, in an environment and culture that is familiar. As such, the SOVC programme aims to strengthen both families and communities, to build their capacity to protect and care for children who have lost their parents, within their own contexts.

In Zimbabwe, 60 per cent of orphans and vulnerable children (OVC) are cared for in grandparent-headed households, usually by grandmothers. Such kinship care arrangements can involve multiple challenges for grandparents; their old age, poor health and financial insecurity can leave families extremely vulnerable.

Through the SOVC programme, FOST empowers grandparents to support the children in their care. The programme:

- Supports the incomes and livelihoods of vulnerable families;
- Provides psychosocial support (PSS) for caregivers and children;
- Improves access to and retention in education for vulnerable children;
- Supports capacity building at the community level, so that the community may support the family to thrive.

It is not unusual for FOST to work with a grandmother of over 70 years old who is supporting 18 grandchildren. In such instances the challenge facing the family is considerable, which makes FOST's comprehensive programme of support so vital.

IMPLEMENTATION

a) **Nutrition and livelihoods:** FOST supports families to build capacity to provide food for their children. For example, they apply the 'pfumvudza' concept to make the best use of small amounts of land to feed a family.

b) **Psychosocial support:** FOST facilitates peer-to-peer support groups for grandparents, where they can discuss their challenges and access training on both life skills and vocational skills. It also runs 'kids clubs' where children can access peer-to-peer support. FOST uses the 'Auntie Stella' programme through which children can seek answers to the questions they have about personal, emotional, and social issues. FOST trains school teachers in PSS skills.

c) **Income:** FOST provides training in income-generating activity and sustainable food security. Many of the support groups have evolved into income, lending and investment groups where participants (usually grandmothers) are encouraged to create a business.

d) **Education:** FOST pays school fees for children on a short term basis and covers the cost of uniforms and stationery; this support improves access to and retention in education for orphaned and vulnerable children.

IMPACT

- 1 Improved livelihoods and greater resilience for 400 beneficiary households, including increased average monthly income and improved food security.
- 2 Strengthened community capacity to care for OVC through training of community facilitators and club leaders and establishment of multi-sectoral Child Protection Committees (CPCs).
- 3 FOST's advocacy work has led to a Government of Zimbabwe review of its policy on alternative care. FOST conducted a scoping study on kinship care in Zimbabwe which has raised awareness of the need to support kinship care.

CHALLENGES FACED

- 1 Demand for FOST's support is high and capacity is stretched.
- 2 Securing sufficient funding for certain activities can be challenging. For example, donors can be reluctant to fund education assistance as they consider it to be a government responsibility.
- 3 Stigma around HIV/AIDS has lessened over time but has not been eliminated; this can impact significantly on children who have lost their parents in this way.
- 4 The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted upon FOST's ways of working and beneficiaries' access to services.



“Zimbabweans believe that a child belongs to the whole community; if the family fails to support the child, the community steps in - and FOST is part of that community.” Blessing Mutama, FOST Director

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FURTHER INFORMATION

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