



# ZOE

Empowerment beyond charity.

## **St. Luke's UMC Partnerships, Rwanda, January 2016 - December 2018**

**Abanyamurava "Brave" Empowerment Group with St. Luke's Serve Ministry;**

**Tuzamurane "Lift One Another" Empowerment Group with the Allen and Thomas Family Foundations  
and Ann Eppinger and Scott Davidson;**

**Ubumwe "Unity" Empowerment Group with the Crump Family**

*The ZOE program facilitator who works directly with your groups provided the following write-ups about the activities and achievements of a household from each of your groups, which are now in their third year. These write-ups are just a few examples of what all the children in your groups have experienced. After the specific information about these households, there is a section that provides an overview of how ZOE helps the children protect their rights and become connected to others so they will continue to thrive after graduation.*

### **Activities of all three featured households**

Immediately upon group formation, the children were taught the basics of agriculture and then provided with seeds, fertilizer, and garden tools so they could plant crops and kitchen gardens during the February/March and September planting seasons. They also all worked on group agricultural projects. Through training on nutrition, the families learned about the importance of using the vegetables they grew to create healthy meals.

In the IGA [income generating activity] training sessions members learned the basics of creating, evaluating, and implementing a business plan. ZOE provided initial grants and top up grants. Training sessions in the second year taught them how to use their financial records to assess their businesses and make adjustments when necessary to maximize their profits.



*Genereuse from Ubumwe Group with her sorghum crop*

When they began working with ZOE, the families featured below lacked the resources and experience needed to create and maintain good hygiene. After health and hygiene training, they worked to achieve the hygiene standards the groups had adopted. These include keeping themselves, their clothing, their homes, and their yards clean; making sure their toilets have roofing and a cover; and drinking boiled water. The groups also had training on reproductive health function and how to prevent HIV/AIDS and other diseases.

All the families contribute to their groups' merry-go-round fund. The money gathered is used to purchase assets (like chickens or cooking utensils) for the whole group. They also participate in "mutual help" group activities. Instead of each family working alone on their chores, home repairs, and in their fields and gardens, group members work as a team, going from house to house.

### Tuzamurane Group

**Head of Household:** Ernestine, 20

**Dependent:** twin Brother Ernest, 20

**Challenges:** Ernestine and her brother lost their parents due to chronic illnesses. Their father passed away in 2002 and their mother in 2014. From that time, these children started a difficult life full of sorrows, hunger, isolation, community denial and street life. With ZOE identification support, their life has changed and they now have been reintegrated into their community who rejected them before. *"I consider this group of young people as my own sisters and brothers, I got a new family"* said Ernestine.

The dream process helped Ernestine and brother to have a plan for her family in both the short and long term. They also learned how to work on a target for achieving their goals. The following are Ernestine's most recent responses to the Dream questions:

- **What makes me sad:** *My parents' death , frequent illnesses*
- **What makes me happy:** *Having food to share with my brother to eat*
- **What I do not like in my community:** *Child abuse*
- **My dream for the future:** *Having a boutique shop*
- **Guiding principles:** *Saving money and praying*



### **Family Specific Achievements Because Of Your Partnership**



*Ernestine sells tomatoes, onions, and green peppers*

**Income Generation:** In April and August 2016, Ernestine got grants and started her business of selling fruits and vegetables. With the profit she bought two goats, one pig and two hens. In addition, Ernestine helped her brother start an animal trading business, selling chickens and rabbits.

**Food Security:** Ernestine grows vegetables in her kitchen garden, as well as crops such as cassava and beans. She started to put aside extra nonperishable food and now has a supply she can access if needed. In their first year they received a goat from ZOE. They now own two goats and two hens, and are food secure.

**Health/Housing:** Their group members helped with home repairs, plastering their house. At the beginning of the program ZOE provided medical insurance for Ernestine and her brother. The family can now pay for their own medical insurance.

**Child Rights and Protection:** Now they have a good relationship with the large community.

**Faith:** These kids thought God abandoned them but the time they met ZOE they started to believe that God has saved their lives. They attend church regularly and Ernest acts as a leader of prayer group. *"I thank ZOE because they showed me a real image of our God; they shared everything needed for saving our lives. Without ZOE support we couldn't reach where we are now,"* Ernestine said.



*Ernestine with one of her goats*

**Prayer requests:** For family progress and strengthening. For business expansion and growth and reaching her future dreams.

#### **Abanyamurava Group**

**Head of Household:** Winifred, 21

**Dependents:** Cleophas, 20, Sylvere, 19, Sylvain, 18, Cecile, 17, Louis, 17

**Challenges:** Winifred and her siblings have missed their parents' love; she started to take care of her siblings and being responsible for their needs when she lost both parents. With life full of sorrows, poverty and isolation, these kids separated from each other and left their home. With ZOE's intervention they have been reunited. ZOE assisted them with their house repairs then they came back home. At the time of identification, Winifred was living in town away from her village, doing a house helper job. Her brother Sylvere was the original head of household. Later on when ZOE reunited these kids, Winifred became head of the household then her brother Sylvere was reintegrated into school.



*Winifred (far right in the red shirt) with her siblings*

In the training for the dream process, they learned how to design a plan for the whole family, setting goals and objectives for achieving them in an appropriate time. The following are Winifred's most recent responses to the Dream questions:

- **What makes me sad:** *The death of my parents*
- **What makes me happy:** *Drinking milk*
- **What I do not like in my community:** *Child abuse*
- **My dream for the future:** *To build a commercial house in town. (In her original dream response she wanted a home and to own a boutique project: she has achieved both of these dreams)*
- **Guiding Principles:** *Praying and saving money*

### **Family Specific Achievements Because Of Your Partnership**

**Income Generation:** Winifred started a business selling fruits and vegetables. From the profits, Winifred invested in other small businesses. New businesses are being implemented by her siblings in such way that every family member got a small business. For instance they opened a boutique (general merchandise store); they also trade chickens, rabbits and goats; sell beans; breed hens, pigs and cows; and grow and sell beetroots, onions, green peppers, and chili peppers.



*Winifred sells fruits, vegetables, beans, tomatoes, and avocados*

**Food Security:** Winifred has planted crops of cassava, beans, onions and Irish potatoes every season. She also planted a kitchen garden in which she grows vegetables year round. In their first year ZOE gave them a pig. They use the manure in their garden. The pig reproduced and the piglets were sold; this increased the family's income. The animals they breed also help to improve their diet. She now owns two cows and currently has twelve piglets.

**Health and Housing:** At the beginning of the program ZOE provided medical insurance for Winifred and her siblings. By the second year the family was able to pay for this themselves. ZOE provided support for Winifred's family with toilet construction, and provided windows, doors, iron sheets, and nails for home repairs. After selling twelve of her pigs Winifred built a house for her boutique.

**Education:** Before ZOE, all five of Winifred's siblings had dropped out of school. After ZOE, Sylvere, Louis, Cecile, Sylvain, and Cleophas have all been reintegrated to school. ZOE provided school fees, materials, and uniforms at reintegration time; now the children can afford all school requirements.

**Faith:** Before ZOE, they felt abandoned by God. From the time they knew ZOE, they felt the love of God and they attend the church regularly. *"Our God has been merciful to us, without his love we couldn't be the people we are now. He brought ZOE into our lives for showing us how much He takes care of us and our needs,"* Winifred said.



*Winifred with one of the cows she bought*



*Winifred with her piglets*

**Prayer requests:** For family progress. For God's strength to be on us so that we get the capacity to care for other children who are suffering.

### Ubumwe Group

**Head of Household:** Genereuse, 21 (far right, tan shirt)

**Dependents:** sisters Marie Agnes, 18, Marie Claire, 15, Josiane, 11; brother Placide, 8

**Challenges:** Before ZOE, The whole family was in extreme poverty. Genereuse and her siblings and were street kids; they used to beg and work for food. Their life was full of sorrows and disappointment. Genereuse's family was not happy about the life they were living. The community was accusing them of stealing and being a burden to the society. There was a conflict between Genereuse' parents, and neither one was caring for the children.

The exercise in creating the Dream document helped Genereuse develop a plan for both the short and long term. She drew a picture of her dream, then after achieving her first dream she drew a new one for the second year. The



following are Genereuse's most recent responses to the Dream questions:

- **What makes me sad:** *Living the life of beggar and laboring for food*
- **What makes me happy:** *Finding whatever is needed*
- **What I do not like in my community:** *Being abused*
- **My dream for the future:** *To buy a piece of land for farming. (She has already achieved her beginning dream of having pigs, a boutique, and two cows)*
- **Guiding Principles:** *Hard working, praying and savings*

### Family Specific Achievements Because Of Your Partnership



*Genereuse in her boutique*

**Income Generation:** Genereuse and her family run multiple businesses at a time; selling vegetables and fruit and running a boutique (a small general merchandise store). ZOE provided them with produce display tables for her business. Genereuse hires one worker to help her and her family run their businesses.

**Food Security:** Genereuse now has a stock of beans; plantations of sorghum, cassava and sweet potatoes; has planted a kitchen garden; and can have vegetables with every meal. She also has four chickens and a pig.

**Health:** Genereuse pays for medical insurance for all her family members with the profits from her businesses.

**Group Activities:** The group income project is basket weaving.

**Education:** Before ZOE, all the children in the family had dropped out of school. School reintegration has been done for Josiane, Placide and Marie Claire. Thanks to her businesses, Genereuse pays the school fees for her siblings to attend school and paid the fees for Marie Agnes to attending vocational training in weaving. She has also helped another sister get vocational training in weaving from one of her group members.

**Child Protection and Rights:** Genereuse and the family are no longer suffering abuse. They do not have to beg or work for food, and they are now respected in the community.

**Faith:** The whole family now has endless happiness. They attend church and feel the love of God. Genereuse and her siblings invite community members to attend church with them. *"I am thankful to God, from the time I met ZOE my family' life has changed. I found how God is a loving father and how much He takes care of His children."*



*Genereuse grows beans*

*We are food secured and our nutrition status has changed until I realized that everything was in God's plan," Genereuse said.*

**Prayer requests:**

- Praying for progress in her business
- Prayer for achieving their future dreams
- Praying for avoiding youth distraction
- Prayer to remember to thank God everyday

**Focus On: Child Rights and Community Connections**



*Genereuse with her pig*

Orphans and other desperate children who qualify for the ZOE empowerment program are some of the most vulnerable in the world. All the awful things that you hear or read about happening to young people are especially prevalent in this group. Their extreme poverty and lack of an effective guardian leaves them voiceless in the face of multiple abuses.

A major focus of ZOE's empowerment program is teaching children about the rights their local government and international law promises. Such training is often conducted by the local officials in charge of enforcing child rights so the children get to know those who are responsible for their protection. By the second year, ZOE children understand what their rights are and how to report offenses. Most importantly, they have a large group of fellow children to back them up and support them. Working together, these children are often better able to defend their rights than others in their village. If someone abuses or threatens abuse to a ZOE child, the entire group rallies to their aide. This continues past graduation.

In the many communities where ZOE works, young girls are particularly vulnerable to abuse. Protecting the rights of girls includes educating the entire community about the dangers and harm inherent in all forms of mistreatment, especially child marriage, sex trafficking, and female genital mutilation. ZOE starts addressing these issues by bringing young people, male and female, together in empowerment groups where all are treated equal and provided with equal opportunities. Friendship and respect grow out of the work they do to help each other prosper. Together, the group can then reach out to educate others in the village, making life better for all children in the community.

Finally, to ensure that the young people can continue to protect their rights after graduating from ZOE, the program facilitators help group members become connected to resources in the community. These include:

- School administrators so that the heads of households feel welcome in the schools and are better able to keep their younger siblings enrolled.
- Local leaders who can help settle disputes over property improperly seized by relatives and can address acts of abuse or discrimination.
- Government representatives who can provide expert advice and even assistance in areas of business development, agriculture or higher education.

ZOE's goal is to ensure that all children are able to stand up for themselves and their rights in the community. Often children in the ZOE group learn this lesson so well that they not only defend their own rights, but also the rights of others who may be abused or neglected in their communities.

## **A Summary Report on Second Year Groups in Rwanda**

*As of October 2017*

The following report was submitted by Rwanda staff and provides an overview of the activities and achievements all working groups have experienced during their second year in the ZOE empowerment program. Following this information is some general background material about ZOE's empowerment approach to achieving health, education, and housing advancements. The 19 groups which began meeting in January 2016 currently encompass 562 households with 1,682 children.

### **Trainings**

**August 2017:** Training on income statements. The young family leaders learned how to track their financial records to assess their business outcomes and determine if they need to redirect themselves into other businesses or adjust capital investments.

**September 2017:** Training on household management. During group meetings, the youth discussed various strategies for maintaining family property including houses, land, plantations, equipment, and livestock. Also, they learned how to assign duties and responsibilities among family members according to the capacity of each member. Through this training the children learn to value their belongings and thus derive more benefit from the resources distributed.

**October 2017:** Health training. All the heads of households attended meetings which during this year primarily covered reproductive health and related disease. Topics included HIV and STD transmission, treatment, and prevention; symptoms of AIDS and STDs; and how to live productively if infected with HIV. The youth backed up their knowledge with action. They voluntarily submitted themselves for HIV/AIDS testing which ZOE coordinated with local health clinics, and formed "Anti-AIDS Clubs" which include other children from their communities. These clubs increase awareness among communities using songs, dances, dramas, and games.

One innovative approach members of ZOE working groups took to promote better health in their community was through the formation of football (soccer) teams. The children of ZOE and other youth have organized regular football competitions during which they share information they have learned about preventing HIV/AIDS, STDs and unwanted pregnancies. ZOE helped kick off the initiative by providing the balls. (See picture below.)



### **Agriculture & Food Security**

Families in ZOE's empowerment program progress from having to struggle daily to secure a survival level of food to having the means to eat at least two balanced meals every day. They achieve this through the income and agricultural projects they undertake. All the children in second year groups are now food secure. After ZOE provided initial resources, the households created kitchen gardens, planted staple crops, and began raising livestock. As their businesses grew or when they obtained money from group projects, they continued to expand their agricultural activities. The following are current numbers for the households:

- 562 plant both kitchen gardens and cassava plantations
- 450 plant additional crops of beans, maize, sweet potatoes, and groundnuts
- 112 established banana plantations
- 378 received goats and 184 received pigs
- 495 have hens and 235 keep rabbits after purchasing these animals through their group merry-go-round funds
- 18 bought cows using their businesses profits



*Group members helping one another create a kitchen garden.*

### **Income Generating Activities**

ZOE encourages the youth to have multiple businesses and to help their younger siblings manage income activities. Where there is an interest and serious commitment, the groups will approve funds for their members to attend vocational training in order to start additional businesses. The tables on the next page show what the children are currently doing to earn money and how they are planning to increase their wealth through various trades.

Current income activities	
Running food stores	130
Selling vegetables and fruits	157
Breeding and selling livestock	530
Trading goats, hens, pigs, and rabbits	89
Making and selling banana juice	20
Baskets weaving and selling:	22
Barber shops	7
Canteens (snack kiosks)	8
Boutique/retails selling	6
Bicycle taxi projects	13
Selling firewood	5
<b>Total</b>	<b>987</b>

It is not uncommon for the youth to combine their resources and skills to begin their small business. For example, after training in welding, three youth received startup tool kits and created a group project making doors, windows, gates, and other metal furniture. And below, group members create and sell their woven products together.



### Health and Housing

- After training on hygiene and disease prevention, members in the groups helped each other construct 168 toilets with iron sheets and nails provided by ZOE.
- Ten children with serious illnesses have received specialized medical assistance at hospitals because of ZOE's assistance.
- Twenty families received emergency assistance for house construction and repair after unusually hard rains caused flooding. For those who experienced the greatest hardship, ZOE provided food and clothing as well.

**Special Award:** ZOE kids attended a district partner's exhibition where they showed their farming and businesses projects. They received an award for outstanding youth project.

Vocational training	
Hair dressing	19
Welding	9
Driving school and mechanics	5
Electrician	4
Carpentry	3
Construction	12
Tailoring	21
<b>Total</b>	<b>73</b>



Additionally, all groups have agricultural projects they work on together such as growing and selling bananas, groundnuts, maize, and various vegetables. Below, a group harvests their groundnut crop.



**ZOE's approach to empowering children is comprehensive, touching on all the areas that hold them in poverty. Only in this way can the children truly break free from the extreme poverty which holds them in bondage. In ZOE's empowerment model there are seven or eight areas in which ZOE helps the children to help themselves. Listed below are explanations of a few of these areas.**

#### **Focus On: Health and Disease Prevention**

ZOE's goal is to address immediate health needs, teach the children how to live healthy lives, and connect them to medical resources. Preventative education includes basic hygiene practices such as encouraging children to wash their hands, boil water, and keep their home and surroundings clean. The trainings also include in-depth instruction on topics such as:

- Nutrition (especially important for children who may have had access to only very limited diets in the past)
- How diseases are transmitted and prevention and treatment of diseases; especially for malaria and HIV/AIDS
- Dangers of substance abuse
- Specialized training for girls' personal health and safety

As a reward for meeting certain basic health and hygiene standards in their homes, ZOE will initially provide mosquito nets (after training on how to use them appropriately), blankets, or other hygiene related resources depending on the needs of the children in their specific region. ZOE also assists the children or group in obtaining soap, water storage tanks, and pots for boiling water, especially during the first year of the program. In later years the children need to purchase or replace items out of their own profits. Similarly, ZOE will help the children enroll with health insurance plans or access medical care by providing partial initial financial assistance, but the children are taught that they need to save money to cover these kinds of expenses on their own. As needed, ZOE will also help with the cost of constructing toilet facilities.

Part of the health training also involves helping the children understand the importance of improving their physical appearance and keeping their home clean and attractive (in Rwanda the children are encouraged to plant flowers on their property) in order to increase their status in the community. When the children look "smart" their confidence increases, they feel better about themselves, and others in the community begin treating them with respect and acceptance. Although once stigmatized by the community for their ragged appearance, after a year or two in the program, you can actually pick out the ZOE children because they are often the cleanest looking children in the village and hold themselves with pride and dignity.

Throughout the African countries in which ZOE serves, HIV/AIDS continues to be a scourge on the lives of the young. Many misconceptions about the transmission of the virus and how to treat the progression of the disease remain, as does the stigma attached to infection. ZOE program facilitators take a multifaceted approach to addressing these impediments. First, all children are encouraged and assisted to be tested for the HIV virus. If the results are positive there are options for treatment that can slow the progression and allow the individual to lead a productive and relatively symptom-free life. Second, ZOE educates all children about how the virus is spread and what steps they can take to protect themselves. And third, ZOE encourages the children to share what they have learned with others in the community so that the overall rate of infection can decline.

#### **Focus On: Housing**

Often, children entering ZOE are living in houses left by their deceased parents that are in disrepair. At other times the orphans and vulnerable children are working in fields or other tasks in exchange for a room. This leaves them little time for any other activities or to earn money for food. There are also street children in the program

who sleep homeless each night. Without a safe and secure place to live it is difficult for children to achieve and maintain economic and social stability in their lives. For emergency situations, ZOE provides a housing grant to the working group. This grant is not enough to pay for the entire cost of a home, but covers expensive items like windows, doors and roofs. The working group then meets to decide who in the group has the greatest need and plans a work day to construct a home for that member and their family. In some areas ZOE is able to partner with local governments or villages to find housing for these children or to supply land and other resources. ZOE's emphasis is on helping the children find appropriate housing while also teaching them how to save money to repair or purchase their own home. Sometimes this means they move in with another group member or find a reasonable renting situation while they save profits from businesses to buy land and build their own home.

**Focus On: Education**

ZOE does not need to teach the children and young caregivers who join working groups about the importance of education. These children desperately want to attend school. Prior to joining ZOE, many children participated in school, but were forced to drop out due to chronic illness, hunger, social ostracism, lack of clothing, and/or lack of money. Once in the program, the young heads of households (many of whom have been out of the educational system for too long to be reintegrated) are eager to see their younger siblings back in school as soon as possible.

So that children can quickly return to school, ZOE will meet with school administrators and assist with some of the expenses such as uniforms, fees, and materials. The working group can also help to secure some of these materials to help their members return to school. As with all other aspects of the ZOE program, the emphasis is on empowering the children to pay for their own educational expenses. It is a great source of pride and self-esteem for the children to be able to share how they are able to work to send their younger siblings to school. It is like hearing parents brag about the accomplishments of their children and it is very moving to see in a sibling.

*The following reports highlight the activities and achievements of families from the three working groups which began meeting in January 2016 and are associated with St. Luke's UMC. Although each child is unique, most of the families in these working groups have faced similar challenges and are making comparable progress through the ZOE empowerment model. The first report includes some general information about ZOE's "Dream" approach to helping children set their goals.*

### **Tuzamurane Working Group**

**Head of Household:** Chantal (19)

**Dependents:** brothers Jean Claude (18) and Christian (8)  
(sister Clarisse (17) is not currently living with the family)

### **Challenges**

Even when their parents were alive, life was difficult for Chantal's family. But the death of their father in 2011, followed by the mother's death in 2015, left the children without any resources besides a house in disrepair. Clarisse left the family to look for better opportunities. Chantal stayed to take care of her younger brothers. By working general labor for their neighbors they could earn a bit of money or some food. But they were generally exploited and rarely had more than a single daily meal of a sweet potato. Sometimes they had to resort to begging. Christian suffered from intestinal worms and malnutrition.

The family had become so isolated from their community that the children received no outside assistance, never had visitors, and did not feel comfortable attending community events. They felt that even God had abandoned them.

When ZOE invited Chantal to join the Tuzamurane Working Group, she and her family began their journey out of extreme poverty. And it started with a dream.

### **Focus on: The Dream**

Most orphans and vulnerable children entering the ZOE empowerment program face a daily struggle to survive. With their energy consumed by the need to find food for themselves and their siblings, there is neither time to think about the future nor reason to hope for something better. But through ZOE and your partnership, the children learn to imagine a new life and prepare to make it a reality.



During one of the early working group meetings, the ZOE program facilitator leads members through an exercise called the Dream process where they explore their current situation and then consider what they want and how to get it. After discussing hopes and goals with their siblings, the family leader creates a poster of responses to a standard set of questions from the ZOE program facilitator. To the left is an example of the Dream document.



The head of each family presents their Dream to the rest of the working group members who express support and give feedback. These Dream documents help the program facilitators better understand the conditions of the children's lives so they can address specific needs or traumas suffered. The family keeps a copy of their Dream, often displaying it in their home to provide daily motivation as they strive to create their new life. As they progress through the empowerment program they will often update their Dream.

The following are Chantal's most recent responses to the Dream questions:

- What makes you feel sad? *Death of my parents.*
- What makes you happy? *Drinking banana juice and eating bananas.*
- What happens in the community that you do not like? *Feeling insecure because of a lack of adult protection.*
- What is your dream for the future? *To be trained in tailoring and own a sewing machine.*
- What will be your guiding principles to achieve your dream? *Patience, hard work, self-confidence.*

### **Family Specific Achievements Because Of Your Partnership**

#### **Food Security**

Within the first couple months Chantal and her brother had planted both a kitchen garden and a crop of sweet potatoes. In May 2016, they received a grant of a pig and were able to purchase four hens with their own money. The hens are providing eggs for their own consumption and to sell, as well as fertilizer for their garden. Today, the family regularly eats two meals a day featuring potatoes, beans and a variety of vegetables.

#### **Income Generation**

In April 2016, after attending small business training, Chantal received a grant of money and began buying and reselling vegetables. She contributes produce from her home garden to increase profits. Additionally, she is participating in the group's tomato farming project which brings in a small income. The group has a merry-go-round fund into which all the group members contribute a small amount of money during each meeting and then rotate the full balance of the kitty among each other. It was very likely this money which Chantal was able to use to purchase the hens.

Through these small income activities Chantal is learning how to handle money, manage a business and is gaining confidence so that in the next two years she will be prepared to start a tailoring business. Already, the money she is earning has made it possible to buy food and clothing. As she notes, *"It was my first time to have enough food at my home."*



#### **Health**

The formal training on hygiene and disease prevention was conducted in July 2016, but even before then steps were taken to improve the family's health and living conditions. First, ZOE made sure Christian received medical attention for his infection and malnutrition. Then, a home visit by ZOE's program facilitator helped identify what actions Chantal could take to improve the home environment. With help from the other group members she

made minor repairs and cleaned up around the home. The family still needs to construct a proper latrine, which the other group members will help them do once they have the necessary construction resources.

The training in July taught Chantal how the family could improve their personal hygiene to avoid illnesses and to achieve better status in the community. She also learned how to treat and seek assistance when sick. ZOE helped her sign up for medical insurance and encouraged her and her brother to participate in voluntary HIV testing this past November.

#### **Community Connections: Education and Faith**

The ZOE program facilitator notes that Chantal and her siblings no longer experience the negative stigma of being destitute orphans. Jean Claude and Christian received school materials so they could go to school regularly and the family started attending church. *"It was hard for me to believe in God until I met ZOE and experienced how God's love is amazing. Sending ZOE to help was an amazing blessing and I am convinced they play well a parenting role,"* said Chantal

The family asks that you pray for their sister Clarisse to reunite with the family.

## **Abanyamurava Byimana Working Group**

**Head of Household:** Thacien, 19    **Dependent:** sister Olive, 16

Thacien was only three or four when his father died and not even a teenager when he lost his mom, yet it became his responsibility to care for himself and a younger sister who was often sick. Thacien is a strong and hardworking young man, but because of his low status in the community as an impoverished orphan, he often faced abuse in the form of low or even withheld wages for the work he did. He and Olive often survived on three meals a week and those meals usually consisted only of cassava. The home they shared was falling apart, neither could attend school and Olive could not get treatment for the asthma, bronchitis and hepatitis from which she suffers.



The following are Thacien's most recent responses to the Dream questions:

- What makes you feel sad? *Death of my parents.*
- What makes you happy? *Eating meat.*
- What happens in the community that you do not like? *Child abuse.*
- What is your dream for the future? *Buying a motorcycle.*
- What will be your guiding principles? *Aim for the best, work hard, save, behave, obey God.*

### **Achievements**

As with Chantel in the Tuzamurane Working Group, Thacien has attended a series of trainings on food security, business development, health and hygiene, and child rights. The first actions he took were to plant his kitchen garden and crops of sweet potatoes and beans. He received a pig as an early grant and later bought two more with the money he earned from his small business. Additionally, he received both a hen and a rabbit from his working group's merry-go-round fund. He is breeding his animals and selling eggs.



Thacien has done remarkably well with his small businesses of selling produce and running a "canteen." His business even requires him to employ another person to procure goods from a nearby city. With money he has earned he has continued to expand his income activities, *"I bought a cassava farm for Rwf 60,000 on my own; never had I dreamt of having such money before,"* remarked Thacien.



Already, after only one year in the program, Thacien and Olive have made improvements to their home and are eating two meals a day of cassava, beans, vegetables and porridge (corn or sorghum). With ZOE's help, Olive was provided with school materials and reintegrated back into school. She also received medical attention and ZOE is currently helping her obtain the monthly medicines she needs. The family now has insurance and also knows what actions they can take to safe guard their health.

Whereas before they felt abandoned by God, now they attend church joyfully because they feel God's love. They live their faith by inviting others to church and sometimes feeding people who are in need. *"If I give, it is not because I have a lot, but because I feel compassion for others who are struggling as I did before. God has fulfilled my needs that's why I cannot close my eyes when it comes to helping others,"* Thacien said.

Thacien's prayer requests include: for Olive recovery, business and family progress, and for dream achievement.

### **Ubumwe Byimana Working Group**

**Head of Household:** Claudine (20) (second from right in photo)

**Dependents:** sisters Chantal (19), Delphine (13), and Vestine (11); brother Eric (17)

### **Challenges**

Claudine takes her role as the head of household very seriously. Along with her sister Chantal, she has sacrificed education and even food so that the others could have a slightly better existence. Even though they have lived with an aunt since the death of their parents (mother in 2003 and father in 2009), they still suffered the hardships and stigma associated with their poverty and being orphans. Claudine and Chantal worked to earn food and money, but they were often cheated out of their wages. The family usually ate no more than five meals of cassava per week and the two older girls suffered from malnutrition.



The following are Claudine responses to the Dream questions:

- What makes you feel sad? *Death of our parents.*
- What makes you happy? *Sharing food with my siblings.*
- What happens in the community that you do not like? *Abuse.*
- What is your dream for the future? *To help Chantal complete vocational training and start a business.*
- What will be your guiding principles? *Work hard, pray, save, and follow advice from ZOE staff and fellow group members.*

### **Achievements**



Chantal and Claudine had both dropped out of school, but now Chantal has begun attending vocational training. The family has planted their kitchen garden and crops of potatoes and tomatoes. Additionally, Chantal participates in the group's tomato farm. They now have a pig provided by ZOE and two hens from the merry-go-round fund. Chantal is earning an income by selling vegetables and weaving baskets. No longer does the family face daily hunger and the health consequences of poor hygiene and malnutrition. Surrounded and assisted by her working group friends, Chantal no longer experiences labor abuse or the isolation of being stigmatized. While once they were angry with God, now they regularly attend church and joyfully share and forgive others.

## Summary Report on First Year Groups in Rwanda, October 2016

*The following report was written by the ZOE staff in Rwanda. It provides an overview of the activities and achievements all working groups have experienced since their first meeting in January 2016. Following this information is some general background material about ZOE's empowerment approach to achieving income and food security.*

In January of this year, 19 working groups, with 530 households encompassing a total of 1,663 children, began their three year journey of transformation through ZOE's empowerment program.



*Members of several working groups attend a regional training session on hygiene.*

### **TRAININGS**

- **Family Dream (i.e. Action Plan), January/February.** During these first meetings, the children learned how to develop an action plan for their family using the “Dream” approach where they express what they want to achieve in the near future, what they like about life in their community, what they don’t like, what makes them sad, and what will be their guiding principles to lead them to make their dream true. (More specific information about ZOE’s “Dream” process will be provided with the first case study report.)
- **Income Generating Activities, March/April.** The heads of the households learned about generating business ideas, conducting feasibility studies, marketing, small business plan development and implementation.
- **Food and Nutrition, May.** The children learned about different types of nutrients, how to create balanced meals, what it means to be food secure, and about malnutrition and its consequences. They also set their own goals for food security and nutrition based on instruction from ZOE. Specifically they learned: it is important to build up stores of cereals and other similar foods which are diet staples; legumes and animal products are needed for protein; fruit tree and vegetable gardens are necessary for vitamins and minerals.
- **Hygiene and Disease Prevention, July/August.** These training sessions covered which diseases are caused by poor hygiene and how to prevent illness. The children discussed and then agreed to standard conditions of hygiene which include: clean body, clean home, use of a toilet with agreed adequate conditions (covered floor and roofing), use of boiled and clean drinking water, bedding raised above the floor, use of a dish drying rack, weeding around home, and not sharing the home with domestic animals such as goats, pigs, cows, rabbits, or poultry. Additionally the groups took action by helping each other construct toilets and clean their homes.

**FOOD SECURITY:** There have been two farming seasons, one starting in February/March and a second starting in September. Families in all 19 groups planted kitchen gardens in both seasons. ZOE provided them with vegetable

seeds and agriculture tools. During the months of May, June, and July, all 530 households received pigs. These pigs contribute to the family's food security by providing manure for the farms and offspring to raise for income.



#### **INCOME GENERATION AND MONEY MANAGEMENT:**

All 19 groups created group mutual funds which they use to loan money to group members for the creation of new projects. Thanks to this mutual fund, all 530 households received a loan to buy either a chicken or a rabbit. During the period of April through August, ZOE also provided grants so that all heads of households could start small businesses as individuals or in small groups. The following are what they choose to do:

- 127 members started food store projects
- 160 sell fruits and vegetables
- 110 breed and raise livestock (goats, pigs, hens, or rabbits)
- 89 focus on animal trading (buying and selling)
- 22 make and sell banana juice
- 22 weave baskets to sell
- 5 work as barbers
- 8 are involved in canteen projects
- 4 grow and sell mushrooms
- 6 operated bicycle taxis services
- 5 sell fire wood and charcoal



*A young ZOE business person trading in rabbits.*

**MEDICAL CARE ASSISTANCE:** ZOE assisted 900 children with health insurance and paid the costs for nine children to be admitted to referral hospitals and for special medication beyond what health insurance would cover.

**HOUSING:** During the months of July, August, and September, ZOE supported six families with house construction and provided materials such as nails, iron sheets, and doors. ZOE also paid for the skilled labor of builders while the associated group members contributed their labor to the projects by carrying bricks, water, and stones.

**EDUCATION:** ZOE supported 22 children in secondary school with school fees and materials while an additional four received vocational training and start-up kits in haircutting and dressing.

### CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS:

- There have been cases where children were abused by their relatives. ZOE assisted these kids in taking those cases to government agencies in charge. In addition ZOE assisted these children in the court prosecution against those abusing them.
- Since many girls have had unwanted pregnancies, ZOE is talking with clinics to organize a specific training and education program for health girls.



*Boys growing mushrooms as a business . . .*



*and trading in chickens.*



*Youth operating a bicycle taxi service.*

**Becoming food secure and generating an income are usually the most urgent needs of the children identified for ZOE. The information below discusses ZOE's empowerment approach to overcoming these challenges.**

### **Focus On: Food Security**

Children entering the ZOE empowerment program struggle every day to alleviate their hunger. Usually they try to find work, but because they lack status or an adult advocate in their community, they are paid extremely low wages or small amounts of food. They might try growing their own food, but they do not have the resources or knowledge to succeed. It is not unusual for these children to go two or three days without eating. Occasionally they must resort to begging or even taking from a neighbor's field just to survive. Even those children who do manage to eat daily suffer health consequences from the poor nutritional value of their meals.

With guidance from ZOE program facilitators, new working groups learn what foods they need to eat as well as explore different ways to attain a stable food source. Because ZOE is an empowerment program, the children are not told what to do, but are instead given options and training so that they can devise their own approach to becoming food secure and self-sufficient.

Children in rural areas who can access land will learn about the best agricultural practices for their region and then be given the seeds, fertilizer, and tools to begin vegetable gardens and/or plant crops like corn. Other ZOE households might start with raising small animals, like rabbits or chickens, after learning about animal husbandry. All children are encouraged to begin earning money as soon as possible to increase their food security.

### **Focus On: Income Generation**

Young family leaders are encouraged to develop multiple income sources. Working groups usually take on a joint business project, like growing a cash crop, raising small livestock, even running a restaurant. These projects will produce profits that all can share. Individual households also start small income generating-activities like buying and reselling food items, phone calling cards, clothing, etc. Later, ZOE helps the children dream larger dreams about how they can provide for themselves and their siblings in more secure ways. For example, ZOE may help a child enroll in vocational classes to start a trade business (like tailoring, auto mechanic, or hair styling), open a kiosk business to sell dry goods or enlarge their farm or livestock breeding to produce surplus they can sell. It is typical for an ambitious young person in the ZOE program to run several income-generating activities simultaneously.

Before being given resources to start these small businesses, ZOE trains all working group members on how to craft a business plan and manage money. After this training, the group takes the following steps:

- Discusses what businesses could succeed in their community and how they can cooperate to serve the market if multiple children want to try the same business.
- Creates individual and group business plans, presenting these to the group for discussion.
- Votes to approve the proposals or help the members create a better plan.

Once the business plan is approved, the individual will receive a micro-grant and/or a start-up kit to begin. Throughout this process the ZOE program facilitator is available to provide guidance, but not to tell the group what to do or make decisions for them. In this way the children begin to learn how to make their own decisions while assisting one another so they may continue this process beyond the three-year ZOE program.

## A ZOE TRIP OF HOPE TO RWANDA, FEBRUARY 2016

Pastor Jenn Williams, St. Luke's UMC



Saturday, February 6: Today was the hardest but most joy-filled day. We had the privilege of meeting two of the three working groups St. Luke's and St. Luke's families have agreed to support. (The third group is going to be in the same "cell" or community but is just being recruited.) Our groups are located around the area north of Butare. The two groups represent 52 households and currently 115 orphaned, vulnerable children. We had the opportunity to meet the leaders of the households who range from 15-20 years of age. I will be honest, I did not know what to expect, or how I would react. We walked into a school room filled with young people on benches, dressed in their best clothes. They were crammed in this small space and they looked as if they did not know what to expect either.

We walked to the front of the room and the chairperson of the group stood and welcomed us through Epiphanie's translation. Then they had us stand with them as they sang a song of welcome and gratitude for our visit, followed by the most beautiful prayer by one of the young men named Thacien. It was at that very moment I looked up and was overwhelmed by this feeling as if I had known these young people all my life. They come from a different world with different experiences, and yet, I felt as if we were in a community of St. Luke's in the middle of Rwanda. These 52 strangers suddenly became a part of our church family.

We spent the next two or three hours with them. The working group was recently identified by ZOE and are only in their fourth meeting of a three year process. They have begun to share their stories with one another, their fears and frustrations, but also their dreams. Six brave young people stood among us and shared their stories. It was not sharing to be heart-string pulling or manipulative, it was a time that allowed them to continue their own healing processes. The more they share their story, the less claim the hurt has on them and the more hurt is replaced by hope. The chairperson explained they knew they could share their stories with us because we are their friends and we will support and pray for them.

Each was timid as Epiphanie translated. The deeper and more pain they revealed, the more quiet they became as they told stories of abandonment, abuse, hunger for days on end, sickness and a desire at times for God to just spare their suffering and let them die. One boy kept clutching his stomach and when Epiphanie asked what was wrong, he admitted he hurt not only from hunger, but from recently having malaria. Malaria has broken out again in Rwanda because mosquito nets have come in under or untreated. At one point Jean Baptiste was able to get

together money to find the medicine, however, did not have enough money for food and the medicine made him ill. These are the difficult choices these young people have to make, not only for themselves, but their siblings and sometimes a disabled parent for whom they, at ages 17, 18, 20 years old are now responsible. Most work day labor jobs in exchange for food, but the food is often not enough to feed their siblings, so they go hungry. One whose father had mental illness, which is discriminated against heavily in these villages, was called “Mad Girl” and shunned as an outcast.

But these young people have dreams. They dream of owning a cow, a home, being able to sell food in order to have enough food for their family. They want to send their siblings to school and live in safety. For us these seem like small dreams, but for them each dream is a road to empowerment and being able to feel like a human with dignity. Choking back our own tears, John stood and shared what he tells his students at Palm Lake Elementary. He told them to have PRIDE: Purpose, Respect, Integrity, Determination and Excellence. Later one of the young men stood and said how inspired he was that someone thought he could live out those words. I welcomed them as part of our St. Luke’s family on your behalf and told them they were beautiful, brave, and loved by God. I also shared our saying at St. Luke’s – “it’s not the same without U”, and let them know that now we included them as a part of the “U” of our community.



Ann had a wonderful idea, which had led us to the market a few days before to find Rwandan fabric. We asked each of the young people to come forward and let us trace their hands and sign their names so we could bring it back to you. This was the turning point. All of the shyness quickly disappeared as they each came forward and placed their hands on the fabric. We smiled and laughed with them, getting a chance to speak to each of them personally, offering handshakes and hugs. Our friends on the team took selfies of them – allowing them to see themselves smiling. We shared cokes and bread with them and some of their little siblings who had been peering through the windows the entire time. There was laughter as I taught them how to fist bump and we made them laugh for pictures. Community was built, sorrow turned to joy, struggle and fear to hope and promise. They gave us thank you drawings to bring back home to you. We sang another song, I wept through a prayer for them (not surprising to any of you), and then the leader shared one

last word. ***“We thought we were below humans and that God didn’t care about us. But today you have showed us that God is real and loves us. We can live our dreams.”***



The Gospel according to St. Luke was written for the outsiders, the outcasts, the forgotten, the widows and the orphans. It shows a Jesus walks with, eats, touches, and heals those who are the least and the last and continually lifts up the poor and marginalized as the blessed, for to such belongs the Kingdom of God. This is what St Luke's was named for over 30 years ago. This idea is the foundation for everything we do, our purpose, our core values, and the foundation of the 4D World Changing Idea to Meet Jesus on the Road and lift children out of poverty and the way we serve with dignity. In the same tradition of all the powerful mission work we have been a part of in our history, in the same hope with which we work in our own city and East Winter Garden, today we started a new journey of empowerment, walking alongside these young people to help them reach their dreams. We will support them, learn from them, pray for them, support others if we can and consider them a part of who we are as a congregation. Today, we again, lived into our namesake and lived out the gospel, letting these children know God's love for them is real. I was so proud to represent you in this heart altering moment. Well done, good and faithful servants.



P.S. Here's the truck we promised a picture of and an apology. This truck was actually purchased by our Mission Endowment Fund. Blame it on my head not my heart, or jet lag, which could be the case as well. Inside the truck are John, Epiphanie and Germain, one of the amazing social workers! They are so thankful for this vehicle and the funds donated to purchase it.

### **Focus On: Group Formation**

When ZOE first enters a community to help children, we begin by engaging the local leaders. ZOE staff members explain how ZOE is an empowerment program, helping the children to help themselves. Although different from the usual relief approach, it resonates with leaders who want to see sustainable change in their village. Since staff are indigenous to each country in which we operate they understand local customs, challenges, and resources available so when they meet with the community leaders they quickly gain trust and support.

The children in your working group began their amazing journey of transformation in January 2016. During the first meetings they experienced understanding, compassion, and acceptance from the other children. They elected leaders, made rules to guide their meetings, chose a group name, and decided when and where to hold weekly gatherings. Within the first six months, the children began training on the topics of food security, health and disease prevention, business management, and child rights. If they had access to land they were provided seeds to start gardens and plant crops. If siblings were not attending school, ZOE provided uniforms and other resources to get them back into classes. Children who had skills were provided grants so that they could start small businesses, others began vocational training. Most importantly, all began to experience God's love and realize that though many are orphans, they have a Father in heaven who loves them.

**Name List:** ZOE staff members make home visits to record information about the children, their dependents and caregivers. They assess if any emergency interventions are required to alleviate health issues, abusive conditions, or inadequate shelter. Once they have confirmed who is eligible for the ZOE program, and have allowed children who are not interested to drop out and others to join, then the staff creates a name list of the children. Please note, children joining the ZOE program often have no parents or birth documentation, and have suffered multiple traumas in their young. Sometimes they are suspicious of the outsiders asking questions. For these reasons, the children occasionally provide erroneous information which we later correct.

On the following page is the list of names and a picture of your specific working group. The names in bold are heads of household, followed by their siblings and dependents. Although ZOE records both first and last names, we use only first names in public lists to preserve the privacy of children in the program. The ages of the orphaned and vulnerable children in the ZOE program range between infant and college age. Some of the children live with an elderly grandparent or disabled caregiver (names in italics). Most often such arrangements include shelter only and the caregiver is unable to provide food, education, health care or other support which children need. Child rights is especially important in such situations so that the children are not abused.

## Abanyamurava "Brave" Working Group - St. Luke's Serve Ministry

29 households and a total of 84 children



### **Marguerite 18**

Immaculée 16  
Donatille 12

### **Jean Pierre 18**

Berthe 16  
André 14

### **Eric 19**

Angelique 17  
Henriette 13

### **Jean Marie Vianney 20**

Eustochie 17

### **Amina 18**

Rachel 17  
Claude 16

### **Audace 17**

Justine 12  
Vestine 12  
Nepomscene 6

### **Emmanuel 18**

Jacqueline 15  
Vestine 12  
Donat 9

### **Evalde 16**

### **Léon 19**

Jean D'Amour 16  
Léonce 13  
Christella 9

### **Sylver 19**

Sylvain 17  
Cecile 16  
Ludoviko 14  
Winifred 18  
Cleoface 20

### **Brigitte 19**

### **Eric 19**

Clémentine 17  
Charlotte 14  
Charles 11

### **Emmanuel 16**

Joseph 12  
Bosco 11  
Eduard 5

### **Appolonie 19**

Charlotte 18

### **Delphine 17**

Anatalie 12

### **Evode 18**

Théonille 14  
Gervais 2

### **Emmanuel 18**

Dieudonné 16  
Patrick 14  
Delphine 11  
Belise 9

### **Flavianne 20**

Giselle

### **Thacien 19**

Olive 16

### **Theogene 18**

Eugenie 20

### **Jean Baptiste 18**

### **Chantal 16**

Peruth 10  
Léa 8  
Alodie 2

### **Emmanuel 17**

Patrick 14  
Elizabeth 8  
Baptiste 7  
Eugène 6

### **Lea 20**

Delphine 18  
Gabriel 11

### **Vianney 18**

Appolonie 14  
Bernadette 9

### **Jean De Dieu 17**

Emmanuelie 11  
Adeline 6

### **Severine 19**

Clarisse 17

### **Uwitonze 18**

Nyandwi 14

### **Asinathe 20**

## Tuzamurane "Lift One Another" Working Group – Allen, Thomas, Eppinger & Davidson

30 households and a total of 96 children



### **Florence 18**

Béatrice 19  
Emmanuel 17  
*Dominique 65*

### **Francine 17**

*Liberata 65*

### **Victoria 19**

Claude 18  
Cansilde 17

### **Colette 19**

Edouard 18

### **Claudine 20**

Emmanuel 18  
Anastasie 16  
Immaculée 13  
Bernadette 16

### **Fils 19**

Pierrine 17  
Josiane 11  
Irène 3

### **Renatha 17**

Vestine 18  
Xavier 20

### **Chantal 19**

Jean Claude 18  
Clarisse 17  
Christian 8

### **Diane 17**

Innocent 10  
*Claude 80*

### **Ernestine 19**

Ernest 19

### **Aimable 20**

Evariste 16  
Liliane 14

### **Emmanuel 18**

Jean Luc 5

### **Jean Claude 19**

Agrippine 16  
Evariste 11

### **Immaculée 20**

Delphine 19  
Gilbert 15  
Théobald 7

### **Patrick 19**

Protails 17  
Jean Baptiste 14  
Pacifique 13  
Vivine 12

### **Appolinarie 18**

Aimable 13  
Vanessa 7  
Justine 3  
Justin 1

### **Evode 19**

Jean Pierre 15

### **Placidie 20**

Garcan 18  
Olivier 11  
Olive 8

### **Anastase 19**

Edouard 18

### **Agnes 19**

Clémentine 16  
J. Marie Vianney 12  
Diane 7

### **Vestine 19**

Liliane 16  
Modeste 15  
*Esther 100*

### **Idrissa 18**

Edmond 16  
Vedaste 12  
Arcad 4  
Peruth 2

### **Jean Baptiste 19**

Anysie 17  
Pascal 15  
Rita 12  
Marie Rose 9  
Aline 8  
Ariane 8

### **Fils 19**

### **Reverien 18**

### **Aimable 19**

Christella 17  
Eugène 16  
Garcan 15  
Ange Marie 7

### **Clémentine 18**

Eric 8

### **Félix 19**

Daniel 13  
Clémentine 11  
Jean de Dieu 9

### **Aimable 18**

Ernest 13  
Solange 10  
Prince 6

### **Delphine 17**

## Ubumwe "Unity" Working Group Working Group – The Crump Family

29 households and a total of 80 children



### **Ernestine 19**

Alexis 14  
Obed 12

### **Ildephonse 18**

Diane 16  
*Thérèse 85*

### **Donatille 20**

Stanislas 19  
Emmanuel 18  
Joseph 17

### **Vincent 18**

Laurent 16  
Emmanuel 14  
Louis 12

### **Eric 18**

Joseph 17  
Pacifique 16

### **Irène 17**

Bénjamin 16  
Vital 15  
Jotham 9  
*Dionise 70*

### **Marie Chantal 19**

### **Généreuse 20**

Marie Agnes 17  
Marie Claire 14  
Josiane 10  
Placide 7

### **Charlotte 19**

Clementine 17  
Patrick 16  
Liliane 12  
Theoneste 7  
*Theoneste 56*

### **Jacques 19**

Solange 13  
Delphine 15  
*François 60*

### **Samuel 18**

Jonathan 15  
Gad 10  
*Theoneste 65*

### **Israel 16**

*Theoneste 57*

### **Emmanuel 19**

Oreste 17  
Pascal 14

### **Agnes 16**

Vestine 14  
Leonidas 8  
*Evaliste 57*

### **Carine 17**

Irène 17  
Frabrice 13  
*Celestin 63*

### **Thamar 19**

Aaron 22  
Noël 14  
*François 66*

### **Damien 20**

### **Henriette 16**

### **Claudine 20**

Chantal 19  
Eric 17  
Delphine 13  
Vestine 11

### **Dismas 19**

Mugisha 8

### **Delice 14**

Emeline 12

### **Elianne 19**

Francoise 17  
Louise 18

### **Regis 17**

Chris 15  
Christian 18

### **Theophile 19**

Olivier 16  
Elisa 10

### **Jacques 19**

Jean Gaga 16  
Blaise 14

### **Gregoire 19**

### **Antoine 18**

Josephine 17

### **Bruce 14**

### **Judith 20**

Jacqueline 18  
Celine 12

**Focus on: Faith**

Often the isolation that the children feel when they begin the ZOE program extends to their thoughts about God. Because they are abused and discriminated against by their community - and often this includes Christians in their village - they believe God has also abandoned or even cursed them. At other times they believe that maybe God does not exist, or if God does exist that they are somehow beyond God's love. In the very first meeting the staff often address the Lord's prayer with the children, and talk about what it means, as an orphan, to call God "Father." They learn that they are not truly orphans because they have their heavenly Father who loves them.

ZOE shares the gospel with these children, but this sharing goes beyond words to deeds. The children both hear and see the very best of the Christian message, and often respond to this in inspirational ways. At each meeting they begin with Scripture readings, prayer and devotions given by a group member, but while this is available to the children they are never coerced into the Christian faith. ZOE's program is religiously non-restrictive, but offers a compelling view of the love Christians show to others.

One of the most powerful parts of the empowerment program is the way these children put their faith into action in their own community. They forgive those who have harmed them; feed others who are even poorer than themselves; adopt other children and share their resources and knowledge with them; pray and care for one another; and pay fair wages to those who had once taken advantage of their situation with hard labor and poor pay. These children return good for evil and can be examples to all of what it means to live our faith.

**Focus on: First Connections**

One of the biggest disadvantages orphans and vulnerable children face is isolation from peers and the larger community. Struggling on their own, the children lack moral support, access to community resources, and a network of people to help them progress and face challenges. ZOE creates connections.

Peer group. Even though there may be hundreds of orphans and vulnerable children living in a community or village, they often self-segregate because of the conditions of their poverty, disease, and/or the stigma of HIV/AIDS. When each new member tells their story during the first working group meeting, they are greatly encouraged to find that there are others who share their same struggles. Then ZOE introduces the children to young people who already graduated from or have made significant progress through ZOE's empowerment program and the new ZOE participants are inspired and energized to begin the work of transformation.

Program facilitator and mentor. Each working group is assigned a program facilitator/social worker. These ZOE staff members usually speak the mother tongue of the region, hold a diploma in social work or related fields and have experience working with children. Additionally, the working group members select a person from the local community to serve as a mentor and advocate for the children within the community. Mentors receive training from ZOE and then attend weekly meetings, make home visits and help ZOE resolve challenges the group may face in the community.

And a powerful connection is you! All ZOE working groups know the opportunities they receive are from God, through the love and concern coming from their partners far away. They are amazed that you would care for them without ever having met them. This powerful connection is further strengthened when a Hope Companion visits the children to witness what they have achieved. In many ways you stand in place of their parents, and to hear that you are proud of what they have accomplished is transformative for these children. Thank you for being a part of building God's Kingdom in this way.