

## Kaithuraniri “ Organizer” Kautine Empowerment Group, Kenya, July 2016 - June 2019 Shared Partnership with Sun creek UMC and Beth and Steve Ploch

### A Summary Report on Third Year Groups in Kenya as of May 2019

*The Zoe Kenya staff wrote the following report. In this last year, Zoe provided only minimal resources meant to help families enhance their level of self-sufficiency. In general, the youth are using their own abilities and the results of their business and agricultural activities to support themselves and their families.*

This is a report covering the activities and achievements of 511 heads of households doing their third year in the Zoe program. Having undergone significant empowerment in the areas of economic strengthening, psycho-social, food security, shelter and care, health and hygiene, and child protection, we can now observe that 95% of the households have achieved all-round self-sufficiency and are ready to graduate from the program.

### Child Rights and Protection

As follow up to child protection interventions implemented over the three-year period, Zoe organized community sensitization sessions to advocate for stricter enforcement of Child Laws. This training also sought to learn how culture affects the education of orphans and vulnerable children in the community.

Youth from all the groups were involved in dialogue sessions with various community leaders. They created an action plan to disseminate information to others in their respective communities. Among the main issues addressed were child labor, early and forced marriages, teenage pregnancies, FGM (female genital mutilation) and drug/substance abuse.

Four regional sessions were organized and attended by local area chiefs (200), administration police (17), probation officers(12), and leaders of the Ameru council of elders (60). Main topics included sexual abuse (including incest, and teen pregnancies) and school dropout. Girls of low economic levels are especially at risk for dropping out because they see marriage as a means to a better future and the dowry cash as means of raising family income. Boys are also forced to drop out in order to raise quick resources as opposed to completing school first and then finding employment. Girls are more disadvantaged because, in the event that resources are scarce, boys will have preference to receive schooling and other opportunities. (Pictured right, Zoe staff leading a session.)



Another session was organized with 30 police officers and 100 local administrators for training on handling children in conflict with the law, effective handling of child abuse cases, and promoting effective responsiveness of law enforcers on child protection issues.

Birth registration continues to be a challenge for orphans and vulnerable children, putting them at risk of losing their inheritance, impeding access to services, and restricting their opportunities. Zoe collaborated with the department for Registration of Persons to inform and help children acquire birth certificates. With intervention, 17 households have pursued cases of disinheritance and were able to retrieve property.

### **Additional Training Sessions**

The participants underwent advanced trainings to build upon those done in their first and second years, all geared towards strengthening their capacity to provide for their families and build sustainability.

- **Table banking.** In February 2019, Zoe invited bank professionals to teach advanced table banking management such as how to maintain proper records, how to handle defaults by members on soft loans, and the dynamics around handling a big loaning base and possibilities to transition into a micro-finance plan. All groups have mature table banking projects that have grown their lending base, some even include members of the community outside of their Zoe group. Additionally, Zoe participants in Kenya are helping train other members of the community who have noticed the progress being made and wish to adopt the approach.
- **Multi-story vegetable farming.** 505 households were trained on this method of gardening which allows for the cultivation of vegetables like kales, spinach, collard greens, and coriander using limited space. (See picture on right) This works well for Zoe participants as a big percentage of families have minimal land that can be used for farming due to preceding poverty levels as well as issues to do with land grabbing by relatives after the death of parents, or being disinherited from family land.
- **Household nutrition.** 99% of households are eat foods of their own choice which are of good quality and quantity. To enhance household nutrition and ensure no child or member in the households is malnourished, Zoe facilitated a training on nutritional needs in October 2018. Households were trained on the proper balance of proteins, carbohydrates, minerals, and vitamins needed to achieve a healthy diet and they reviewed which foods supply these nutrients. They all vowed to practice creating balanced meals since they have the potential to afford all these classes of foods.
- **Household management and role in society.** Zoe provide its participants parental-like guidance to help the children grow-up grounded and have a sense of identity. During training in November 2018, they were sensitized to the roles they play in their families and communities; teaching them to be responsible members of these societal institutions. They were also taken through the acceptable and Christian-like roles of boys and girls in society.
- **Family planning.** The heads of households and appropriately aged siblings attended training which addressed issues they would encounter as they continued to mature, especially regarding reproductive health and the prevention of unwanted pregnancies. They were encouraged to always visit a qualified health personnel for advice and also for family planning services.



### **Food Security**

All households are food secure and sustainably empowered to grow and/or buy their own food.

- 90% are planting crops like potatoes, maize, beans, vegetables, and sweet potatoes which provide sufficient amounts to eat as well as surplus to sell, especially during growing seasons like the most recent which had good rains. (This was an improvement over previous years when the youth experienced droughts.)
- 72% are growing kitchen gardens with vegetables like collard greens, spinach, carrots, onions, kales, and coriander.
- 74% are keeping livestock like pigs, rabbits, goats, chicken, cows, sheep, or turkeys. They obtained their initial stock of animals either as a grant from Zoe, by purchase with their business earnings.
- 20% of the families have a cow or bull

### **Group Agricultural Projects**

Empowerment groups are encouraged to have as many projects as possible to enhance team work, group cohesion, and continuity.

- 11 groups are keeping pigs
- 17 groups are keeping chickens
- 12 groups are farming crops like maize, beans, sweet potatoes and vegetables in a small garden

### **Income Generating Activities**

In general, the income activities of the third-year youth have multiplied and become more stable so that 580 youths have experienced commendable progress in terms of household economic strengthening and are now sustainably, financially independent. This number includes the 511 heads of households and 69 siblings.

The youth were encouraged to start multiple businesses and so alongside the primary businesses started with Zoe grants, an additional 497 side businesses were later started using profits, loans from group funds, and the expansion of agricultural activities.

During the three years, 238 participants also began running technical skills-based trades as follows: 76 hair stylists, 48 barbers, 49 tailors, 10 machine knitters, 4 electrical wiring technicians, 11 mechanics, 21 carpenters, 10 masons, and 9 welders. Zoe assisted 19 members who could skillfully ride motorbikes to acquire the appropriate licenses so they could operate taxi businesses without being harassed by traffic personnel from the government.

### **Financial Stability**

Youth were trained to employ various means of investing money so as to earn interest and save for the future:

- 489 members are saving in local bank accounts;
- 502 are using mobile money transfer platforms like MPESA, both for savings and transacting business;
- 509 are saving with the Village Savings and Loaning Associations (VLSAs), which in addition to enabling them to grow their savings, also increases their status in the community as the money they invest contributes significantly to the economic growth of their communities.

### **Health and Hygiene**

Their general health has improved and the families are reporting about a 90% reduction in the occurrence of disease. Zoe has encouraged all households to purchase health insurance and 60% of the heads of households and their siblings are now covered. When it was especially important for a family to have insurance because of their general health situation, Zoe provided financial support to initiate the coverage; otherwise the families are paying for the insurance with their own money.

Zoe encourages all households to live in a healthy environment free from pollutants and health hazards. In this light, Zoe supported all households with energy saving "jiko" cookers to use for making meals at home. This was necessitated by the fact that many households were using fuel alternatives that were hazardous to their health due to the harmful smoke they emitted. The previous means of cooking also required significant amounts of fuel. With less smoke emission, the families are experiencing less respiratory infections and the children are able to do their homework in a more conducive environment in the evening. Youth with their jikos below.



The heads of households are also now empowered to observe responsible sexual behavior after going through training on reproductive health and family planning. This has helped them make better informed decisions on when to get married, when to have children, and how to choose the right partner. This has resulted in a decline in participants having unplanned pregnancies and also suffering sexually transmitted diseases.

### **Community Integration and Networking**

Zoe groups continue to learn from each other and support each other through regular regional meetings, exchange visits, and participating together in community events. Zoe encourages these activities as a way to promote a sense of belonging among the children and help them feel connected to their community. To further the community connection, all 17 groups are actively involved in community service and giving back to society in various ways like taking care of the elderly, feeding the poor, visiting the sick, and adopting other orphans.

In December 2018, 170 Zoe participants from these third-year groups joined other Zoe youth to mark International World AIDs Day. They used the event to speak up against stigmatization of those infected or affected by the disease and to champion responsible sexual behavior for the prevention of new HIV infections, especially among the youth of Kenya.



In February 2019, 400 Zoe participants from the third-year groups in the Tharaka region participated in a “social day”. The Zoe youth played soccer, volleyball, handball, and other sports, competing against each other on an empowerment group level.



*Below: members of Action Makandi group cleaning the church where they worship and conduct group meetings.*



***The ZOE program facilitator who works directly with your group provided the following write-up about the activities and achievements of a household supported by your partnership. Although each child is unique, most of the children have faced similar challenges and are making comparable progress through the ZOE empowerment model.***

**Head of Household:** Eunice, 20

**Dependents:** brothers Antony, 13 and Jeff, 11; sister Stecy, 5

**Challenges:** When Eunice lost her dad, she was forced to drop out of school so that she could support her mother and help raise her younger siblings. She did casual jobs where she received a meager pay and sometimes she was not paid, the community was not concerned with the situation and even neighbors rarely visited them as they were viewed as a bother or burden. Sometimes Eunice was forced to beg from her relatives for support and at times they were turned down. Her siblings would go for weeks without attending school due to lack of essentials.

**The Dream:** Training in the Dream process teaches the children how to develop a plan for achieving self-sufficiency and creating a Dream chart provides daily inspiration to work towards the goal.

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

- **What makes me sad:** The death of my father
- **What makes me happy:** Being able to provide for my siblings
- **What I do not like in my community:** People who want to exploit and victimize the vulnerable children
- **My dream for the future:** To own a wholesale cosmetic shop and later build my own house and buy a car
- **Guiding Principles:** Praying, hardworking, patience and honesty



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

**Income Generation:** Eunice together with other group members has been trained on simple business skills such as identifying viable business gaps and markets in their community, preparing good records of sales as well as bookkeeping. Just like each member of the group, Eunice identified a business to start, prepared a business plan, and submitted it to the group. Since she already had some hairdressing skills, her plan was to open a hair salon. The group approved her plan and the distribution of a start-up kit which consisted of materials and money to start her salon shop. She now earns an income which has improved the standards of the household.





*Eunice working in her hair salon and out in her maize field.*

**Agricultural Projects and Food Security:** The group was trained best farming practices, seed selection, land preparation and proper post-harvest care and storage to avoid loss. This training was aimed at ensuring an increase in production and avoiding loss during the storage period as they speculate the market. After training, Eunice received planting seeds and farming equipment. She has been able to lease a piece of land where she does her modern farming, despite the recent bad climatic conditions the family has had enough food to eat as well as surplus to sell.

In addition to improving their quantity of food, the family has adopted quality eating where they ensure that meals are well balanced. To enhance both these areas, Eunice has purchased two goats and eight chicken with her business profits. The chickens are producing eggs which provide nutritional value to the family's meals as well as extra income.

**Group Activities:** The Kaithuraniri Kautine Group has a very active table banking project with a kitty of about ksh. 75000 (\$750). This has been of great help to the group members since they are able to borrow loans at a reasonable rate to boost their businesses or address emergency needs. Another funding project is their merry-go-round into which each household contributes ksh.100 every week. The group also has a farm where they planted beans and they are keeping sheep.

**Health:** During the health and hygiene training, Eunice and her groupmates learned about personal and general cleanliness. This included the need for good grooming as well as ensuring each household has a utensil rack, a rubbish pit, and a hand wash jerry can for homes that do not have tapped water. They also learned about the importance of and how to sterilize drinking water; on the need to clear bushes from around the house to reduce mosquito breeding areas; and the need to cover/enclose the pit latrine at all the time to avoid flies which can contaminate food when they touch it. After Eunice demonstrated that her family was maintaining these standards, she was rewarded with two blankets and a water tank for storing drinking water.

**Housing:** When Eunice joined the program she did not have a proper latrine, but with help from her groupmates she has been able to dig and construct one. Her house also is not adequate enough for her and her siblings so she is working and saving towards building another one.

**Education:** Antony and Jeff did not attend school regularly due to lack of school levies, school uniform, and stationeries. The Kaithuraniri Kautine group decided to provide school uniforms for the siblings and from the profits she makes in her salon Eunice has been able to provide for them the stationeries. This has resulted in them now attending school regularly.

**Child Rights and Protection:** Like the majority of the children in ZOE's empowerment program, Eunice did not know that even orphans had right as children. Many were abused like Eunice who had worked in several homes as a house girl where sometimes she was either under paid or denied wages completely. All members of the group have been trained on child rights and protection; they are now informed and know the channels to follow up to report an abuse.

Eunice has become a champion of child rights in her community. She sensitizes her fellow youth and also helps any abused child report and receive justice; especially on issues pertaining to the girl-child such as FGM (female genital mutilation) and early forced marriage.

**Spiritual Strengthening:** Initially, Eunice felt as if God had forgotten her and her family because of the challenges she went through, but now she is a very active member in her church. Together with her siblings, they attend church regularly and are happy that God has been faithful to them.

**Prayer requests:** To pray for her working group to continue being united and active, to pray for her dream to come true and also for her family.

**Special Achievements:** Eunice reports that being invited to attend functions in her community - such as fundraising and weddings - was something which in her lifetime she had never been afforded the opportunity. Now, as a respected and accepted individual and business woman, she is happy to receive such invitations.



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

***April 2017 - April 2018***

The following report was written by Kenya staff. It provides an overview of the activities and achievements all 17 groups have experienced during the second year of the ZOE empowerment program. These groups began meeting July 2016 and include 510 households with 1,840 children. Following this information is some general background material on how ZOE addresses issues of health, education, and housing.

### **PRIMARY TRAININGS HELD DURING THE PAST YEAR**

[Note: The first year of ZOE's empowerment program is training intensive. During the second and third years, ZOE provides less formal trainings while members of the groups take a more active role in advising each other. The ZOE program facilitators and group mentors provide assistance as required or requested.]

**Post-harvest care.** As a follow-up to the agriculture and food security trainings carried out during their first year in the ZOE program, all 510 households were trained on correct post-harvest storage of crops and best practices of safe post-harvest pesticide use to avoid pest infestation and other post-harvest issues like aflatoxin. Armed with these skills, youth have been able to improve the quality of their produce hence maximizing their profits at the time of sale, as well as ensure that their families have a constant supply of food to eat throughout the year.

**Drought resistant crops.** As a measure on drought/famine mitigation, ZOE has conducted intensive trainings for the households on the concept of drought-resistant crops. The households were enlightened on which maize, beans, and cassava varieties could withstand low levels of rainfall and taught the best practices of planting these varieties. ZOE also provided households with sweet potato tubers for planting after the training. These tubers were planted in both individual farms and group farms, and have provided a good boost towards food sustainability and security throughout the year for these families.

**Specialized boys/girls training.** A big gain for the ZOE program in Kenya this last year has been the successful impartation of life skills on heads of households and siblings. This was done during separate workshops facilitated by professionals in different relevant fields whom ZOE brought in to mentor and train. The sessions were separated in terms of gender; 342 girls and 203 boys took part in the trainings. Topics covered include self-esteem, effective communication, reproductive health issues, gender roles in society, as well as problem solving and decision-making skills.

**Table banking and savings management.** ZOE invited professionals from local banks and micro-finance bodies to train youth on table-banking skills, record keeping for group funds, as well as savings management. **495** heads of households were trained.

**Child rights and protection.** In May 2017, ZOE educated the youth of all groups on their rights, and enlightened them on reporting channels for abuse. ZOE invited local law enforcement officers to train and sensitize the children, covering laws and policies affecting children, particularly the Children's Act, Sexual Offences Act, and other relevant laws. These trainings had 450 participants.

## ACTIVITIES IN AREAS OF ZOE EMPOWERMENT

**Food security.** Building on support and resources received from ZOE in their first year of the program, 94% of households are now growing their own food, which includes maize, beans, green gram, sweet potatoes, and different types of vegetables in kitchen gardens. This season an average of three bags, 90kg each, of different crops was harvested in every family. The families are also keeping, on average, seven chicken and three rabbits; several families have a cow or bull.

All 17 groups are doing farming as a group project, growing maize, beans, potatoes, green grams, watermelons, kales, and sweet potatoes. Each group was encouraged to have as many projects as possible, to act both as income sources as well as efforts towards food security. Other projects the groups are involved in include rearing pigs (7), keeping rabbits (5), commercial chicken laying (4), and keeping sheep (1). Group projects encourage teamwork, group cohesion and continuity after graduation.



ZOE continues to provide support follow-up and linkages between the empowerment groups and key players in the agricultural sector. These efforts are aimed at ensuring quality harvests and providing better markets for produce for all the households. Five groups were able to supply maize and beans to local schools through facilitation by ZOE. Individual families were also linked to government agricultural extension officers for further training and assistance to enhance farming and productivity.

The groups have experienced only fair harvest in the last two seasons, both at group and household level because there was insufficient rainfall just like the previous years which also experienced drought. As a counter intervention by the ZOE program, 15 of the working groups have established functional food banks in collaboration with other support groups in the community and government extension officers who provide support services. This has enabled 89% of the households to have enough to eat throughout the last year. The nutrition of 68% of the households has also significantly improved.

**Income Generating Activities (IGAs).** In addition to the various life skills trainings the children have undergone to empower them to be all-rounded individuals, ZOE has continued to encourage them to work towards economic stability and security through having different Income Generating Activities(IGAs).

The heads of households who received their first grants to start income activities have been able to boost their businesses from a second round of funding support in the form of a micro-loan they received in September 2017. Generally, they have started new businesses alongside the initial ones they began in 2016. Their businesses include:

- selling new clothes (4), plastic sandals (4), and second hand clothes (13)
- selling fresh fruit through stalls (37) or by going village to village (10)
- making and selling food items like boiled eggs (48), potatoes chips (34), and traditional porridge (28)
- operating stores where they sell fresh farm produce such as potatoes, cabbages, carrots, collard greens, onions and tomatoes (58) or general products such as maize flour, wheat flour, sugar, rice, cooking oil, laundry soap, exercise books, pens and sanitary towels (50)
- operating small restaurants that serve an estimate of 10-30 people in a day (15)
- buying in bulk and selling in small quantities dry cereals such as beans and maize (57)

In the last two years, 170 youth additionally received their start-up kits of equipment, materials, and funding to run trade businesses. At least 38 youth have enrolled themselves in vocational training/apprenticeship to acquire a skill of their choice that will enable them diversify their businesses: 15 are training on tailoring, 17 on hairdressing and beauty, 3 on mechanics, 2 on hair cutting/barber shop skills, and 1 on carpentry. 66% of households now reporting a stable source of income.

In the last year, 495 youth having received training which emphasized the need for various saving plans. Already 487 are saving and transacting using mobile money banking services (M-PESA), where they are able to save money, send money, as well as receive payments for goods and services. Bank accounts in their local community were opened by 28%. As part of the training received from ZOE, households have embraced the concept of investing in multiple ways, including buying livestock such as chicken, rabbits, cows, pigs and goats, investing in parcels of land (real estate) as well as motorbikes.

All 17 groups have very active table banking projects which enables members to quickly access funds in order to address emergency situations, make home improvements, and boost businesses. The borrowing base [i.e. funds available for borrowing] in most of the empowerment groups now ranges between Ksh.98, 000 to Ksh.132 000 [about \$980 to \$1,300]. Each group also has a merry-go-round initiative which all household members participate in by making contributions of between Ksh. 100 to Ksh. 150 shillings each week. Each member then receives the lump sum of financial benefit in turn. Members have used the money to buy chicken, chairs, utensils, and other household necessities or to boost their businesses and start additional businesses.

**Health and hygiene.** ZOE staff have been doing follow-ups during home and business visits to ensure that families observe and adhere to basic health standards and practices. Generally, there is commendable improvement on personal, household, and environmental health and hygiene standards for 96% of the children, both heads of households and siblings.

- **Insurance:** 143 have enrolled in the National Health Insurance Fund. Of these, 60 received funds from ZOE to cover the monthly premiums during the first year, but now they are able to pay premiums from their income.
- **Housing:** At recruitment, most of the families were living in poor housing with some having no place to call home. Since then, 165 families have renovated and improved their housing. ZOE provided support for 17 of these, while others used their savings from their income generating activities coupled with group contributions, in form of labor and money.



*Group members work together on a house construction project.*

- **Latrines:** 45 households have been able to dig and construct standard pit latrines/bathrooms using their business savings or proceeds with material/ labor-based support from their empowerment group.
- **Water:** Regular supply/access to clean water was a major challenge for most of the families at recruitment. After starting businesses, 27 families have been able to install clean piped water that is safe for drinking in their homes. Another 40 households have bought big water storage tanks, with capacities of 250 liters and over, in addition to the water tank they received from ZOE during their first year of empowerment.

Owing to training and empowerment received through ZOE, children have formed advocacy groups to teach other teens/young people in their communities on the importance of taking responsibility to make sure other siblings and family members lead healthy lives. Every group has an advocacy committee of 6 girls/boys who are now creating awareness among their siblings and other teens in the community about the importance of responsible reproductive health behavior.

**Child rights and protection.** Over the last year, ZOE has been a big champion for improved enforcement of laws and policies affecting children, particularly the Kenya Children's Act, Sexual Offences Act, and other relevant laws, at the local, sub-county and county level. ZOE also sought to strengthen the capacity of VCOs (Volunteer Children's Officers). Fifteen VCOs were targeted and empowered to effectively handle and monitor child abuse cases and create linkages between them and other relevant institutions/agencies for action.

**Education.** ZOE supported 175 youth who are in high school with school fees and 420 siblings who are in primary school with school uniforms. This has resulted in increased retention in school. In addition, some heads of households have been able to pay school levies, purchase stationery and also buy school uniforms for their siblings who are in school. As a result of ZOE support, there has been an improved performance in school for OVC. For instance, because they have access to balanced meals, the children can concentrate better in class.

**Official identification.** Birth registration continues to be a challenge for orphans and vulnerable children in Kenya, putting them at risk of losing their inheritance and impeding effective access to government services. ZOE collaborated with the department for Registration of Persons to enlighten the children on the procedure for acquiring a birth certificate. Out of this initiative, 90 children have registered and successfully received birth certificates. The birth certificates have assisted 15 households to claim back their inheritances and access their parental properties.



**Networking.** ZOE empowerment groups across years have been working together, sharing ideas and benchmarking on individual business initiatives as well as group projects like table banking. ZOE facilitates information exchange visits between groups and also social days when children from the different groups come together and compete in sports like football, athletics, volleyball, etc. These kind of inter-networking activities have helped build the confidence and exposure of the young participants that comes from interacting and sharing with other children from other regions. It has also helped curb stigma directed at the youth by their communities. Some groups have formed dancing clubs, football clubs, and netball clubs. These activities cheer them up, help them have a more positive outlook towards life, and give them a sense of belonging, even though most of them have lost parents. Below, ZOE empowerment groups and mentors from different regions attend an exchange visit.



### **Special events.**

Revivals and Christmas celebrations: To strengthen their faith, ZOE invites various community pastors to preach the word of God to the children during revivals and Christmas celebrations which are held in December every year when ZOE children from different regions and their siblings share the word of God with others. During these preaching many children gave their lives to Christ. In the last year, 450 of the children attended revival meetings held over three days in the month of December. Over the month of December 2017, each of the 17 groups held Christmas celebrations at the group level. They ate and drank together to celebrate the birth of Christ. One of the groups also visited an elderly lady in their community and shared their food with her during Christmas.

Peace concert: In July 2017, 280 youth took part in a peace concert to spread a message of peace right before Kenya went to the polls. Young participants from the ZOE program served as advocates for peaceful elections and spoke out against youth being used by politicians to perpetrate elections offences and violence.

World AIDS Day: On the 1<sup>st</sup> of December 2017, 180 youth joined the world in marking the International World Aids Day. Training they received during their first year of the ZOE program around the issue of HIV/AIDS has empowered them to carry out advocacy towards the prevention of HIV and against stigmatization of those living with the virus within the communities they live in.

International Day of the African Child: In June 2017, 180 youth joined the world in marking the International Day of the African Child. During these celebrations, champion clubs from 5 empowerment groups led other ZOE participants in providing entertainment aimed at awareness creation on the rights of the child.

**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 back. In ZOE's empowerment model there are 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 report highlights the activities and achievements of one family from your working group. Although each child is unique, most of the children in the Kaithuraniri Group have faced similar challenges and are making comparable progress through the ZOE empowerment model. Included with this case study is some general information about ZOE's "Dream" approach to helping children set their goals.***



**Head of Household:** Beatrice, 21 **Dependents:** Jeremiah, 11 and Jackson, 9

**Challenges:** Beatrice's parents died when she was very young. Purity, the ZOE program facilitator who works with the group reflects, "After the death of their parents, Beatrice and her siblings could not provide for themselves. Due to their poor living conditions, each of the boys left home with no hope and ultimately became street children. The house became increasingly run down. Beatrice sometimes got work as a farm laborer and was able to earn enough for one meager meal a day. What little food any of the children could get was insufficient and they suffered from malnourishment. She was never invited to community events because of her poverty but would stand to the side and wait to get the leftovers when the event was over. She had a lonely, isolated, and miserable life until she heard about ZOE – and then began to dream.

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

- What makes you feel sad? *Death of my parents.*
- What makes you happy? *Spending time together with other orphans.*
- What happens in the community that you do not like? *Drunkenness and laziness.*
- What is your dream for the future? *To do farming in a big way and also have a big tailoring shop and boutique in the region, selling all types of clothes.*
- What will be your guiding principles to achieve your dream? *Consistent prayer and hard work.*

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

Purity reports that Beatrice is now able to afford two meals each day; that she is more "active in the things of God" and in her church; and that "she is now happy with herself." One of her biggest joys is that she was able to bring the two boys back to the home and they are living happily together.

**Food Security:** Like so many others in her working group, Beatrice had known hunger all of her life, which is why it is a ZOE priority to help these children become sustainably, food secure. After training in agriculture Beatrice



planted a kitchen garden of vegetables and a field of staple crops (like beans and maize). Later, she bought four goats and ten chickens which provide protein for the family meals and manure for the garden. The family is now eating two or three nutritious and balanced meals every day—a miracle for them!

**Income Generation:** After discussion with her group and learning the basics of business management, Beatrice decided she wanted to make her living through tailoring. With a ZOE grant to open a tailoring shop, she began making clothes for others and now dreams of having a boutique of specialty clothing. In the meantime, she has applied the profits from her tailoring business and a loan from her group's table banking project to rent space and run grocery store. Here she can also sell some of the produce she grows on her land. Her profits have made it possible for her to pay for Jeremiah and Jackson to be in school and also for the family's health insurance.

She is a busy entrepreneur, establishing multiple sources of income for sustainability and making plans for future growth. Beatrice has become a leader in her village and her ZOE group and she shares her blessings by training others.

**Health:** Good health practices are also needed for sustainability, so ZOE provided training in health and hygiene soon after the group formed. Beatrice and her family put their learning into practice: clearing brush from around their home and building a handwashing station. From ZOE they received blankets, a mosquito net, and a storage tank for clean water. The ZOE staff also taught them about personal hygiene so now their appearance is a source of pride.

**Group Involvement:** Beatrice has been transformed by participating in the Kaithuraniri Group. No longer suffering from isolation, she has friends with whom she has been able to share the pain, challenges and successes in her life. She and the group members have worked together on their farm raising beans, potatoes, and maize. They also raise exotic trees to sell. The group helped Beatrice repair her home and make it safe and she in turn has helped other group members with their household task.

**Faith:** Through participating in prayer and bible study with her group, her spiritual life has also grown. Beatrice's family now attends church regularly and prays at home. Her ZOE program facilitator says, "[Beatrice] feels that the love of Christ through ZOE has brought her joy, peace, and more, knowing that she has a father in heaven."

Her prayer request is, "Help me thank God for my life for I never knew that one day I could have a source of income that is mine and be able to help my own life."

## 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 right 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.

## **A Summary Report on First Year Groups in Kenya as of May 2017**

*The following report was submitted by the ZOE staff in Kenya, only minor edits from the original text have been made. It provides an overview of the trainings, activities and achievements all working groups have experienced since they first met in July 2016. Following this information is some general background material about ZOE's empowerment approach to achieving income and food security.*

### **Introduction**

This is an annual summary report covering the 17 first year groups which began meeting in July of 2016. The groups are about to complete their first year under the ZOE program and the 525 households are now able to afford basic needs like food, clothing and education. They have established income generating businesses and have made significant progress towards economic sustainability, food security, optimum health, and psychosocial empowerment, all through support from ZOE and the Hope Companions.



*One of the July 2016 working groups after receiving blankets for their families.*

### **Overview of Training**

Children were trained on health, hygiene and disease prevention in September 2016. The heads of households and their siblings were trained on how to achieve and maintain proper personal health, hygiene and grooming. Training sessions included when and how to wash hands; clearing bushes from around their houses to prevent malaria infections; eating well cooked food and balanced meals.

Agribusiness training took place in October 2016. The youth were trained on selection of planting seeds, best planting methods, weeding and harvesting as well as proper food storage and seed preservation. They were also trained on bookkeeping and business management issues related to agricultural activities.

In November 2016, the family leaders and some of their younger siblings (a total of 625 youth) were trained on HIV/AIDS and STDs prevention and symptoms. Specific training was provided to about 350 girls on life skills, female child rights, puberty and the dangers of early marriages.

Business start-up and basic management skills training took place in December 2016. ZOE invited business experts from local banks and micro-finance corporations to train the children. They taught them how to start a business, how to choose the right business, customer relations, how to market a business, basic stock control, and how to manage their earnings so that they could have a savings account.

## Food Security

All households were taught how to grow their own food both by creating vegetables gardens and by planting crops. ZOE then provided the appropriate planting seeds, machetes, and hoes. Five hundred household planted kitchen gardens in October. Vegetables like cabbages, collard greens, spinach, tomatoes, onions and amaranth have been important supplements to the children's meals, hence improving their health generally and also improving their economic status since these are foods they do not have to buy and can even sell the surplus.



The households also planted crops of maize, beans, green grams, and sorghum depending on the climate of their areas and their personal preference. The rains during the October 2016 through February 2017 season were not so good, but these households managed to harvest enough to start them off on their journey towards food security. They stored some of the harvest in the food banks which ZOE helped them set up and are using it for household consumption. They also sold some of it for an income and replanted some of the seeds during this planting season which started in March. The rains this season have been adequate and this time they are expecting a bountiful yield.

All of the 17 working groups are also doing group farming projects. ZOE supported them with money to hire land and also gave them planting seeds. The proceeds the groups got from their first harvest mainly went into their table banking fund, which has enabled them to have their own "micro-banks" at the group level from which the members can borrow for different needs.



## **Livestock**

Livestock are both a source of income and savings. Through breeding and egg production, livestock can generate substantial income and if there is an urgent need for money, the children can sell their livestock quickly. The animals also help to supplement their household nutrition and present an opportunity for the younger siblings to contribute to the family's economic status by being the animals' primary caregiver. A total of 105 households received ZOE grants to purchase small livestock. Depending on their preference and capacity to take care of the livestock, the children bought chickens, piglets, rabbits or ducks. Additionally, 170 heads of household bought livestock using proceeds from their individual businesses. Ten groups out of the 17 are also keeping livestock as a group project: four are keeping chicken, three are rearing pigs, and three are rearing sheep. The income they get from selling the livestock or their products goes into group savings or their table-banking fund.

## **Income Generating Activities (IGAs)**

In December 2016, the 525 heads of households underwent training on business management and then created basic business proposals, which they presented to their groups. During a meeting, the members analyzed each other's business proposals with help from ZOE staff. They then approved business ideas and decide on how much each member was to get to start a small business. With the micro grants that were immediately distributed, the youth began businesses such as running kiosks to sell general supplies; selling grains, vegetables, bananas and other groceries; boiling eggs and making porridge to sell; trading in small livestock; buying and selling clothing and shoes (new and second hand).

There were 170 heads of households who had transferable skills in technical trades like welding, masonry, carpentry, hairdressing, auto-mechanics, electrical wiring or barbering. These youth were supported with start-up kits in August 2016 so they could quickly start their own businesses. A start-up kit includes equipment required for their particular trade, money to rent a premise, and other miscellaneous resources. These entrepreneurs are growing their businesses and even employing other people in the community.

For those that wished to also pursue a trade, ZOE gave them an opportunity to acquire the skills through apprenticeship and vocational training. By April 2017, 101 heads of households were trained in the following trades and ready to receive start-up kits: carpentry (5), hairdressing (40), dressmaking (16), welding (7), mechanic (14), knitting (2), and barbering (17). Upon completion of training, they were supported with tools to start their own businesses. Sixteen youth are paying for their own trainings using proceeds acquired from the first businesses ZOE helped them start. When they are ready to open a new business, the group's fund will be available to them for loans.

## **Table Banking**

Table banking is another type of income generating activity which all 17 groups have organized. All members contributed some money and put together a kitty from which they can borrow soft loans and pay back at an agreed interest. Each group has its own unique set of rules governing how their table-bank operates. Some groups have their members buy shares in the table-bank and then allow them to borrow depending on how many shares they buy. For these groups in their first year of the ZOE program, their table-banking projects began with as little as 50 Kenya shillings (half a dollar). They also put in money they received after selling their group harvest and some put in the small fees of 50 Ksh that each member gave back to the group after receiving hoes and machetes from ZOE. This, plus the interest accrued on the loans paid back by members, has helped to grow the various table-banks and in turn has helped to improve the lives of these children, mainly because they are able to access

micro-loans/soft loans to help grow their businesses. Periodically, when the table bank fund has grown substantially, the group will divide profits and start again.

### **Health and Hygiene**

Before joining ZOE, over half of the children from these groups suffered diseases ranging from mild ailments like colds and flu to chronic illnesses like stomach ulcers. A number of them even suffered malnutrition. This was due to poor hygiene standards, poor feeding habits/patterns and lack of proper medical care. ZOE gives priority to health and hygiene, mainly because it is very fundamental for their empowerment. The heads of households need to be healthy in-order to participate in income generating activities, and their siblings need to be healthy in order to regularly attend school. Also, better health means less money spent on emergency medical care.

Immediately after recruitment, ZOE took the 525 family leaders through training on health, hygiene and disease prevention. After training the families implemented and completed various task such as: constructing a dish drying rack at their homes, digging a compost pit for waste disposal purposes, placing a handwashing container outside their latrines, and making it a habit to wash hands effectively after visiting the toilet and before handling food. The families were rewarded with blankets, mosquito nets and water tanks to store clean drinking water.



*A July 2016 working group with their new containers for storing clean water.*

Twenty-six households were supported by ZOE and their groupmates to rebuild, repair or renovate dilapidated shelters. Additionally, eight toilet facilities were built with assistance from other working group members and community resources. The health, hygiene and general living conditions of these households have improved and they no longer fall sick as often or suffer from malnutrition.

### **Networking**

The working groups visit each other to exchange ideas and experiences related to running businesses, animal rearing, farming, table banking, group projects, and other issues relevant to their level. If one group is doing better at something than the other one, they freely share with the other group how they do it so that the other group can learn and improve. This can also pass for benchmarking. They also share challenges they are facing and the other groups help to suggest or give possible remedies.

At group level, members interact as brother and sister and view each other as one family. They help each other cultivate individual land, clean-up houses and provide labor during house construction. They visit each other at their homes and spend time together working on their group projects. This helps them bond and develop stronger relationships amongst themselves and know each other better outside of the group meetings.

Members of the groups assist in community work like cleaning up the town and church compounds and also attending to community activities like harambees (fundraisers), church functions, football club matches and ceremonies like weddings. They also visit the elderly and give them food and water.

### Special events

- **Revival fellowship meeting:** In December 2016, 150 household attended a three-day revival meeting. They prayed together with other ZOE participants, sung, did bible study and 30 of them gave their lives to Christ.
- **World AIDS Day 2016:** After undergoing training on HIV/AIDS prevention in November 2016, 300 heads of households joined the world in commemorating the World AIDS day on December 1, 2016. They offered their voice in advocacy on issues surrounding stigma against those living with the virus in their communities.



*Youth from multiple working groups attending the December Revival.*

### Challenges and Solutions

The groups experienced challenges this last planting season because there were inadequate rains and this resulted in poor harvests. ZOE helped to counter this by giving the households more planting seeds this planting season, hence helping cushion these children from drought and enabling them to get back on track towards being food secure. This season, in addition to the traditional crops of maize, beans and peas, 420 households are growing drought resistant crops like cassava, sweet potatoes and green grams.

Another challenge was that there was an out-break of a poultry disease which killed all the chicken one group was rearing as part of their group projects. ZOE helped them start over again and linked up with the local government vet to give some guidelines on how to prevent the chickens from contracting diseases.

**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.



### **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 July 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; however, the youth who is the head of household must be old enough to manage a small business and so is usually between the ages of 14 and 21.

Some of the children live with an elderly grandparent or disabled caregiver. 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 are especially important in such situations so that the children are not abused.

***The children are encouraged and strengthened by the knowledge that their Hope Companion is not only supporting them with resources, but also with prayer and in the belief that they are capable of great things. Thank you for making this journey of transformation with them.***

## Kaithuraniri “ Organizer” Kautine Empowerment Group

35 households and a total of 117 children



### Michael 15

Ken 9  
Favour 7

### Elijah 19

Agnes  
Navikelia

### Doreen

Damaris 19  
Phineas 18  
Emmanuel 4

### Mercy 17

### Fridah

Rafael 16  
Jefitha 14  
Margaret 7

### Fredrick 18

Jackson 16  
Josphat 14

### Florence 16

Doglas 4  
Michael 2

### Priscilla 18

Alex

### Miriam 16

Linersy 4  
Wiskey 7  
Persaes 1

### Eunice 18

Antony 11  
Jeff 9  
Stecy 3

### Lilian 18

Melody 16  
Brian 12  
Selista 7

### Linet 19

Josphat 15  
Geofrey 9

### Fatuma 19

Mwende 10  
Mukiri 14  
Mutembei 9  
Koome 7  
Mukami 4

### Caroline 18

Dawin 11  
Robben  
Kary  
Angel

### Emmah 17

### Agnes 16

### Maureen 19

### Daniel 15

Caroline 5  
Agnes 11

### Francis 19

### Angela 16

Gideon 17  
Mercy 11

### Erick 14

Karani 9  
Ezekiel 11  
Muthomi 13

### Purity 19

Bonface 15  
Edith 11  
Ostin 9  
Janesio 5

### Nanis 16

Chrispers 13  
Millicent 10  
Raphael 6

### Agnes 15

Douglas 19  
Blessing 12

### Mikela 16

Fridah 18  
Jackline 14  
Leah 11

### Ann 14

Brian 13

### Rose 18

Olivia 4  
Purity 19  
Isaac 20

### Purity 18

Alex 16  
Kentony 5  
Winfred 17

### Purity 18

Johnah 20  
Blessing 12  
Ancity 2

### Priscilla 18

Titus 11  
Yvonne 8

### Elosy 18

Raphael 10  
Collins 5  
Precious 2

### Naomi 15

Derrick

### Purity 17

Gladys 14  
Joel 11  
Samuel 8

### Beatrice 19

Jeremiah 10  
Jackson 7

### Jackline 19

Jasper 17  
Emmanuel 16  
Godfrey 15  
Annmercy 3  
Dickson 11  
Yvonne 7  
Dominic 5

### Joseph, Mentor

**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.