

## Tuzamurane "Lift One Another" Kinihira Empowerment Group, Rwanda Partnered with Mt. Zion UMC, January 2020 – December 2022

### FIRST YEAR CASE STUDY REPORT - March 2021

*The Zoe Empowers program facilitator who works with your group provided the following report on the activities and achievements of a household supported by your partnership. Although each child is unique, this report reflects the challenges and progress of every household as they move through Zoe's empowerment model. Additional information about your group's progress follows this case study.*

**Head of Household:** Pierrine (21)

**Dependents:** nieces Sandrine (4) and Promesse (3); daughter Sonia (2)

**Challenges:** Pierrine has already experienced many difficult times in her young life. Her mother died when she was five years old. At thirteen, her father had an accident and drowned in the river. After that, Pierrine lived with her older sister. They survived by working for food. Life was hard, and Pierrine left home hoping to find a house helper job in the city. Unfortunately, she could not find a job and lived on the streets. In this vulnerable condition, she became pregnant and decided to return home. By that time, her sister had two children of her own. Her sister also left home, leaving her daughters with Pierrine. After struggling to take care of just herself, Pierrine found herself trying to support three very young children.

**The Dream:** The training in the Dream process teaches the children how to develop a plan for achieving self-sufficiency; creating a Dream chart provides daily inspiration to work towards the goal. The following are Pierrine's original responses to the Dream questions:

- What makes you feel sad? *The death of my parents*
- What makes you happy? *Having enough food to feed my family*
- What happens in the community that you do not like? *Child abuse and stealing*
- What is your dream for the future? *To reunite with my older sister; to have a goat; to own a cow*
- What will be your guiding principles to achieve your dream? *Saving and good management*



*Pierrine and her family*

### Family Specific Achievements Because of Your Partnership

**Income Generation and Agricultural Projects:** After completing her training in entrepreneurship and basic business practices, Pierrine started a project making and selling banana juice. Her business is doing well, and she employs one worker to process the banana juice. She has rented additional land for farming and grows several different crops. She harvested two seasons of beans, with a third already planted. She harvested one crop and

sowed a second of both soybeans and sweet potatoes. She also planted cassava, maize, and yams. Some of those crops will be ready for their first harvest soon. In addition, Pierrine has planted a vegetable garden and keeps



*Pierrine in her maize field*

livestock. Zoe provided her family with a goat, and she also has a pig and seven rabbits.

Before Zoe, Pierrine's family suffered from hunger and malnutrition. Now she grows or buys all the food she and her family need. They eat at least one balanced meal every day and regularly eat cereals, legumes, tubers, vegetables, fruit, and fish. The children have begun to see an improvement in their health due to the changes in their diet.

**Health and Housing:** Pierrine and her family suffered from diseases due to poor hygiene, but she could not afford medical services when they were sick. Zoe assisted the family with

health insurance, and now they can access medical care whenever needed. Pierrine also learned about hygiene and disease prevention. She has put into practice what she learned and keeps the children and their environment clean. They recovered from their illnesses and do not get sick as often. Pierrine has also built a toilet, thanks to her group's support through the mutual help activities.

**Child Rights and Community Connections:** Before she joined the Tuzamurane Group, Pierrine was desperately poor. She owned almost nothing and tried to borrow daily necessities from her neighbors. When things were at their worst, and Pierrine struggled to feed herself and her young dependents, she sometimes attempted to steal from her neighbors' farms. She often was caught. She was isolated and looked dirty, and she was not valued. Many things have changed since that time. The Zoe staff, the group mentor, and other group members regularly visited Pierrine to help her address the abusive situation she faced before Zoe. Now she has enough food to eat, nice clothing to wear, and owns all her essential household items. Her neighbors respect her, and she has friends in the community. Zoe staff also assisted Pierrine in requesting and acquiring birth certificates for her daughter and nieces.

**Spiritual Strengthening:** Pierrine thought that prayer was nonsense because she did not believe that God cared for poor people. Through Zoe, she learned that God loves her and cares for all people. Now she joins her group in prayer.

**Pierrine's Prayer Requests:** *"Please pray to God for my life to improve as I continue to care for my daughter and my nieces. Keep them healthy, and pray for me to reunite with my sister."*

**Quote from Pierrine:** *"I am so proud that I no longer steal or beg for food. I am no longer afraid of other people; I feel I am a human being like my neighbors. I can grow my own food, and I have livestock - I never dreamt of having it before. I have savings, and I am sure the future will be even better."*



*Pierrine is with some of her livestock. Owning a goat was one of her dreams.*

## GENERAL UPDATES ON THE TUZAMURANE EMPOWERMENT GROUP

Due to COVID-19 and country regulations, Zoe empowerment groups sub-divided into smaller pods, each composed of five to seven heads of households that meet regularly. One representative from each pod forms the leadership team. This structure keeps the group connected with all its members, their mentor, and their program facilitator. They can share information even as they follow all the government COVID restrictions.

### **Group Income Projects and Activities:**

Merry-Go-Round Fund: They started this fund during the first month after the Tuzamurane Group was formed. It has helped the group members gain experience saving and investing the small sums of money that passed through their hands. Each group member makes a small contribution to this fund at every weekly meeting. They give the collected amount to one family, with all members eventually getting a turn. They used the money to buy small livestock like chickens and rabbits and rent land for farming cash crops.

Table Banking: As soon as their business became profitable, they shifted from the merry-go-round fund to the table banking project. They created this fund to facilitate access to short-term, low-interest loans. They collect money from each member every week. Once a month, they distribute the money to those who have applied for loans. These loans help the group members boost their existing businesses, create new projects, buy livestock, and rent or buy land for farming. They plan to share the profit from the interest payments at the end of each year.

Farming: Group members grow cassava on rented land. Zoe provided access to farmland, seeds, hoes, and fertilizers. The group contributes by working on the cultivation and maintenance of the farm.

Mutual Help: The group works together on some of their chores and large projects such as crop cultivation, house repair, or toilet construction. They helped every household in the group with planting kitchen gardens and growing food crops through this activity. They also help people in the community outside of the Zoe program.

**Food Security and Agricultural Projects:** All 30 households planted crops, had kitchen gardens, and planted larger gardens with a mix of vegetables to sell. Zoe provided each family with seeds for their kitchen gardens (beets, cabbages, carrots, green vegetables, and onions) and fruit tree seedlings (avocados, oranges, and tree tomatoes). Zoe also gave each household a goat or a pig; many families have bought additional livestock with their business profits. The details are in the below tables.

Livestock	# of Families	# of Livestock
Goats	26	30
Pigs	8	8
Chickens	21	63
Rabbits	7	25

Crops	# of Families
Beans	25
Cassava	26
Maize	23
Rice	2
Soybeans	24
Sweet potatoes	5
Vegetables	30
Yams	4

**Income Generating Activities:** All heads of households received business training and grants to start income-generating projects. Additionally, two members received vocational training in tailoring and one member trained as a mechanic. The chart below shows the main projects run by group members (some have more than one). Note: “selling food stores” means buying staple food crops such as beans, sorghum, maize, and flour from farmers at harvest time, storing them for a few months, and reselling when they fetch a higher price.

<b>Projects</b>	<b>#of Youth</b>
Breeding and selling livestock	4
Farming: vegetables	2
Selling fruit and vegetables	11
Ripening and selling bananas	5
Making and selling banana juice	1
Selling food stores (beans, maize, sorghum, soybeans)	3
Grocery store	6
Boutique (retail shop)	1
Selling eggs and samosas	3

### **First Year Activities in Rwanda**

*The following is an overview of the training and activities the children in the Zoe Empowers Rwanda program have experienced during their first year in the program.*

#### **Income Generation**

Training on income-generating activities: In March through June, Zoe Rwanda staff facilitated training for all the 2020-C1 groups. They learned about selecting a good business idea, small business planning, and project implementation. Each head of household submitted a proposal and applied for a grant.

Provision of grants: Every head of household received a grant and started an income activity. Zoe deposits the money for grants in the group bank account, and then the group manages the dispersal. Once youth began earning profits from their businesses, each group started a table bank with member contributions. Group members can apply for loans from this fund to boost their businesses and create new income projects.

In the coming year, all groups will receive grants to support their group income projects and table banking fund as well as top-up grants for boosting individual businesses.

#### **Food Security**

Training on food security and nutrition: The training was conducted in collaboration between Zoe staff and the government agronomist in each community during February and March. The participants were trained on how to obtain sufficient and nutritious food through their projects instead of begging or doing labor for food. They also learned how to create balanced meals for better health. During this training, Zoe staff helped group members set standard requirements for food security. The goals for each household typically included having a store of dried legumes (beans, soybeans, groundnuts) and cereals (maize, rice, sorghum); planting a farm of tubers (potatoes, sweet potatoes, cassava, yams); creating a kitchen garden of vegetables for daily use; and growing at least one fruit tree.

Demonstration on kitchen garden planting: In March and April, the government staff in charge of agriculture (agronomist) conducted the training on growing vegetables and planting kitchen gardens.

Agriculture inputs: Following agricultural training sessions, Zoe provided seeds and hoes for household projects and access to land, seeds, fertilizers, watering cans, and insecticide spraying machines for group farm projects. Between September and December, Zoe provided each household with livestock. They were given either a goat or a pig, according to their preference. Thanks to their income projects, participants have bought additional small

and large livestock. Government veterinary services provided vaccines and veterinary treatment whenever needed. In January 2021, the households received fruit tree seedlings.

### **Health & Hygiene**

Training on disease prevention: This training was done by government health services and health center staff between May and July. The participants were trained on the prevention of diseases caused by poor hygiene such as malaria, skin diseases, intestinal worms, diarrhea, and others. There was also training on diseases like HIV/AIDs, hepatitis, reproductive health, high blood pressure, diabetes, and on the Covid-19 pandemic.

### Health Assistance:

- Some children were found sick at the time of identification, and Zoe provided them with emergency support. Zoe provided health insurance for all first-year participants in August 2020. The heads of households were encouraged to pay for this coverage for the following years; it is expected that they will be able to do so with their small business profits.
- All youth had the opportunity to be tested for hepatitis B and C infection. Those testing positive received treatment.
- After Covid-19 training, families received soaps and face masks. Some Zoe youth joined community leaders in encouraging people in public places to follow Covid-19 precautions.

**Child Rights:** This training has been postponed to 2021 because of Covid-19 restrictions on large gatherings. However, throughout the year, Zoe staff, mentors, and group leaders advocated for children on issues such as property recovery and obtaining birth certificates.

**Spiritual Strengthening:** Youth and children offer prayers with their groups. Pastors and preachers have joined Zoe staff occasionally during monthly meetings. In general, the youth now believe in God's love and are not angry with God anymore.

**Housing:** Through mutual help activities, each group helped members in need of house construction, house repairs, and toilet construction. Zoe provided building materials such as iron sheets, nails, doors, and windows. The group contributed labor such as making bricks, collecting trees, and working on the construction.

**Education:** Zoe helped children who had dropped out reintegrate into school.

**Note about Rwanda group names:** The youth choose their own group name. The first part of the name is their self-description and the second part is a reference to their location so that we can distinguish between groups that choose the same name for themselves.

**Name List:** Before an empowerment group name list is created, Zoe Empowers staff members take time to get to know the youth. They 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 Empowers program, and have allowed time for children who are not interested to drop out and others to join, then the staff creates the name list. Please note, children joining Zoe often have no parents or birth documentation and have suffered multiple traumas in their young lives. Sometimes they are suspicious of the people 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 most of the heads of the households in your group, taken with the precautions necessary due to COVID-19. Photos that were taken of some of the groups during their early training sessions, before restrictions were in place, are on the page after that. The names in bold are heads of household, followed by their siblings and dependents. Although Zoe records both first and second names, we use only first names in public lists to preserve the privacy of children in the program. The ages of the orphans 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 14 and 21 years old.

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 partner 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.***

## Tuzamurane Kinihira Empowerment Group, Rwanda

30 households and a total of 75 children



**Agnes (f) 18**

**Aimable (m) 20**

Agnes (f) 16  
Regis (m) 13

**Alice (f) 20**

**Appolinaire (m) 20**

**Bonaventure (m) 18**

**Callixte (m) 20**

Claude (m) 19  
Jean Pierre (m) 18  
Ezechiel (m) 17  
Ferdinand (m) 14  
Egide (m) 9

**Christophe (m) 18**

Josiane (f) 13  
Joselyne (f) 6

**Clement (m) 18**

Noel (m) 14

**Eldegardi (m) 18**

**Emmanuel N. (m) 20**

Theogene (m) 17  
Agnes (f) 14

**Emmanuel I. (m) 20**

**Emmanuel Y. (m) 20**

**Felicien (m) 19**

Francoise (f) 17  
Claudine (f) 10

**Felix (m) 17**

Chantal (f) 12

**Georgette (f) 19**

Rose (f) 18  
Vanitha (f) 16  
Lucky (m) 2

**Goretti (f) 17**

Agnes (f) 10

**Joseph (m) 16**

**Innocent (m) 20**

Munyangabo (m) 17  
Emmanuel (m) 16  
Fidel (m) 14  
Francois (m) 10

**Innocent (m) 19**

Adrien (m) 12

**Rose (f) 18**

Jean Aimee (m) 16  
Jean Claude (m) 13  
Janviere (f) 8

**Jean De Dieu (m) 16**

Fassi (f) 7

**Josiane (f) 18**

Catheline (f) 15

**Marthe (f) 18**

Ratifa (f) 4  
Goodline (f) 2  
Daniella (f) 1

**Marthe (f) 17**

**Marthe (f) 16**

Philippe (m) 12  
Olivier (m) 2

**Moise (m) 19**

Adelphine (f) 18  
Samuel (m) 16  
Henri (m) 5

**Nelly (f) 20**

Tabita (f) 13

**Pascalie (f) 18**

Silver (m) 16

**Pierrine (f) 20**

Sandrine (f) 3  
Promesse (f) 2  
Sonia (f) 1

**Samson (m) 20**

Grace (f) 19  
Yusta (f) 18  
Joseph (m) 18



The photos on this page were taken of some of the Rwanda empowerment groups that started in January 2020. The groups were able to begin their empowerment training early this year. They were trained in the Dream process and drew their Dream Charts (see the below section on “The Dream” for more information). The groups also had training in food security and nutrition. As the COVID-19 pandemic began to reach Africa, the Rwandan government instituted strict measures to help contain the virus. Large gatherings were no longer allowed, so the formal training classes were suspended. The program facilitators stayed in contact with the groups through the mentors and group leaders.



**The following is an overview of how the Zoe Empowers program enables orphaned and vulnerable children to move beyond the need for charity by comprehensively addressing the multiple challenges faced by those in living in extreme poverty.**

### **Group Formation**

When Zoe first enters a community to help children, we begin by engaging the local leaders. Staff members explain how Zoe is an empowerment program, enabling children to move from crippling poverty and dependency to economic and social self-sufficiency. 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 Zoe operates they understand local customs, challenges, and resources available.

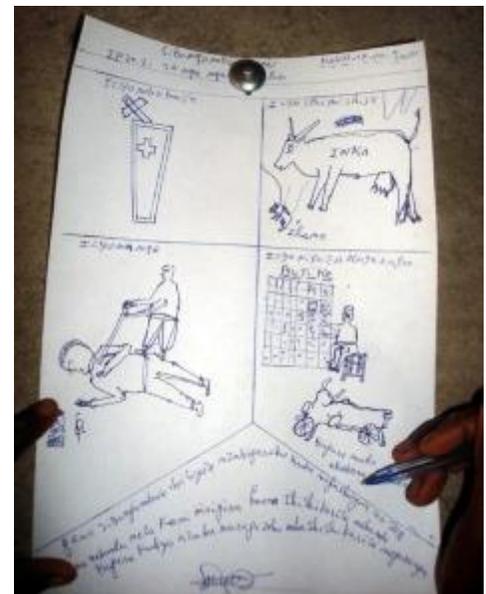
During the first meeting the youth elect leaders, make rules to guide their meetings, choose a group name, and decide when and where to hold weekly gatherings. The youth complete training on topics of food security, health and disease prevention, business management, and child rights within the first six months. If they have access to land they receive seeds to start gardens and plant crops. If siblings are not attending school, Zoe provides uniforms and other resources to get them back into classes. Children who have skills are provided grants so that they can start small businesses, others begin vocational training. Most importantly, all begin to experience God's love and they realize that though many are orphans, they have a Father in heaven who loves them.

### **The Dream**

One of the first tasks new members complete is the creation of their "Dream" chart. Most orphaned and vulnerable children entering the Zoe empowerment program face a daily struggle to survive; 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.

The Zoe program facilitator leads members through an exercise called the Dream process where they examine their current situation and then set their goals. After considering their family's hopes and needs, the youth who is considered the head of the household and is the primary member of their empowerment group creates a poster of responses to a standard set of questions.

This youth then presents the Dream to the rest of the group members who express support and give feedback, especially concerning the primary goal. 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.



### **Connections**

One of the biggest disadvantages orphaned 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. The youth served by Zoe have often dropped out of school and stopped attending church or community events. They do not even realize how many others share their plight, but at the first group meeting, when each new member tells their story, the bonding process begins. By working together on group projects and helping each other make improvements to their homes, friendships form and the group becomes an extended family committed to helping each other face challenges and achieve their dreams. New Zoe group members are also introduced to youth who have graduated from Zoe or been a member of another group for a couple years. These relationships provide advice based on experience, networking possibilities, and inspiration.

Program facilitator and mentor. Zoe program facilitators usually hold a diploma in social work or related fields and have experience working with children. They care deeply about the children and are available to provide counseling as needed, but they do not fill a role of guardian nor do they attend all the group meetings. This is important so that the youth develop their own problem solving abilities and can become fully self-reliant. Each group has a local mentor which they select to help represent and guide the group within their community. Mentors receive training from Zoe and then attend weekly meetings, make home visits, and help resolve challenges in the community.

Community leaders and government officials. This includes school administrators to help children return to classes; local leaders who can address cases of abuse and improperly seized property; government officials and specialists who can provide expert advice on business development, agriculture and higher education; and health service providers. In Rwanda, many government programs exist to promote better use of land for agricultural purposes, support entrepreneurship, and recognize innovation. Zoe staff works closely with the groups to increase awareness of these opportunities and make sure the youth know how to take advantage of them.

And a powerful connection is you! All Zoe 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 if a partner can visit the country to witness what the youth have achieved.

### **Child Rights**

A major focus of Zoe's empowerment program is teaching children about the rights their local government and international laws promise. 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. Additionally, Zoe's group-based model creates crowd support through which the youth can defend each other from all forms of abuse; physical, financial or emotional.

In the many communities where Zoe works, young girls are particularly vulnerable to abuse and often feel they are powerless to resist. 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's emphasis on forming gender-mixed groups strengthens the support available to girls within their groups and creates leaders who will encourage fair and just treatment for all.

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 these lessons 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.

## **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 quality of their meals.

With guidance from Zoe program facilitators, new 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.

## **Income Generation**

Zoe helps the children generate an income at both the group and household level. A group project might involve growing a cash crop, raising small livestock, or producing and selling a product like soap. These projects provide experience, foster group cohesion, and produce profits for the group's savings and loan fund. Individual households also start small income generating-activities like buying and reselling food items, phone calling cards, clothing, etc. Some youth who are already skilled immediately receive resources to begin businesses in trades like tailoring, auto mechanics, or hairstyling. Zoe urges youth to continue growing their wealth and financial security by completing vocational training, expanding their business into new markets, or starting multiple businesses.

Before distributing resources, Zoe trains all empowerment group members on how to craft a business plan and manage money. After this training, the group members take the following steps:

- Brainstorm what businesses could succeed in their community
- Create individual and group business plans and present these to the group for discussion
- Vote to approve the proposals or help the members create a better plan

Once the business plan is approved, the individual receives a micro-grant and/or a start-up kit. Throughout this process the Zoe program facilitator is available to provide guidance but does not tell the group what to do or make decisions for them. If a poor decision is made, the youth will learn from the experience, but still have the support of their group and Zoe to try again.

## **Merry-Go-Round Funds and Table Banking in Rwanda**

In many African countries, informal cooperative societies exist that are used to pool and invest savings. Merry-go-round funds are used by nearly all Zoe groups to promote savings and are established soon after income from individual or group projects becomes available. At each meeting, all group members contribute a small amount into a single pool of money which is then given in full to a different member each time. A variation of the merry-go-round concept used most often in Rwanda involves saving the money until there is enough to make bulk purchases of small livestock, groceries, or housewares to be distributed to each member.

With table banking, all group members contribute the same amount then the money is immediately given out as short terms loans. Interest is paid up front and also made available for loans. By the end of the meeting all money is distributed. These short term loans are most commonly used to quickly expand businesses and the principal is returned by the next meeting. The fund grows fast, and dividends are paid to all members. In Rwanda, laws restrict the very poor from taking out loans to protect them from exploitation. As a result, families joining Zoe cannot participate in table banking until they have reached a level of success with their businesses and family assets. Once the children are doing well enough that they can join a table banking group, they often prefer to join one of the groups that already exist in their village instead of starting one within their empowerment group. They feel the village groups, made up of local business owners, are more stable. Joining one of the groups in their village also helps with their reintegration into the community. One of the goals of the Zoe program in Rwanda is for every family to join a community banking group by their third year.

### **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 hand washing, boiling water, and keep their home and surroundings clean
- Nutrition, especially important since the children have often had very limited diets
- Diseases transmission and treatment; especially for malaria and HIV/AIDS
- Dangers of substance abuse
- Specialized training for girls' personal health and safety

Many of the children have lost a parent to HIV infection and often the children too are suffering from the virus. Because of the associated stigma, they are usually reluctant to discuss their status and sometimes even avoid treatment. Zoe provides supportive opportunities for children to be tested, helps them access medications, and educates to counter the many misconceptions held in the community.

After youth achieve basic health and hygiene standards in their homes, Zoe provides the first distribution of items like mosquito nets, sleeping mats, blankets, and hygiene products. Zoe helps families enroll in health insurance plans and/or access medical care by providing assistance. For continued self-care, the youth learn to budget their own money for insurance, emergencies, and health related products.

Training also includes teaching the children about the importance of improving their physical appearance and keeping their home clean and attractive 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. In the second and third years of the program it is possible to pick out the once-ragged Zoe children because they are often the cleanest looking children in the village and carry themselves with pride and dignity.

### **Housing**

Often, children entering Zoe are living in houses left by their deceased parents that are in disrepair or are homeless without a permanent residence. It is also common for orphaned and vulnerable children to work in exchange for a room; this leaves them vulnerable to abuse and with little time for other activities or to earn money for food. In general, Zoe does not provide housing for the children, but it does give the group funds which they can use to help out those members in greatest need by providing temporary rent assistance or materials to make emergency repairs. Zoe will also to provide basic construction materials like roofing materials or windows in limited quantities. Usually, the youth save money to improve their housing and their groupmates provide

labor assistance as needed. 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.

### **Education**

Zoe does not need to teach the children and young caregivers who join empowerment 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 group may also pay for some of these materials when there is a special need. 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 youth who are the heads of their households 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.

### **Spiritual Strengthening**

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 a Zoe staff member often shares the Lord's Prayer with the children, and talk about how they are not truly orphans because they have their heavenly Father who loves them.

Meetings begin with Scripture readings, prayer, and devotions led 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, yet 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 as Christians.