Newsletter August 2018

Kufambatose Foundation
Progressing together

Introduction

This is the very first newsletter of the Kufambatose – 'Progressing together' Foundation.

We dedicate ourselves to the cause of a group of very vulnerable children in the Zaka district in Zimbabwe: children with motor disabilities. These children often stay below the radar of local health care professionals and get little (to none) support from the communities they are born into.

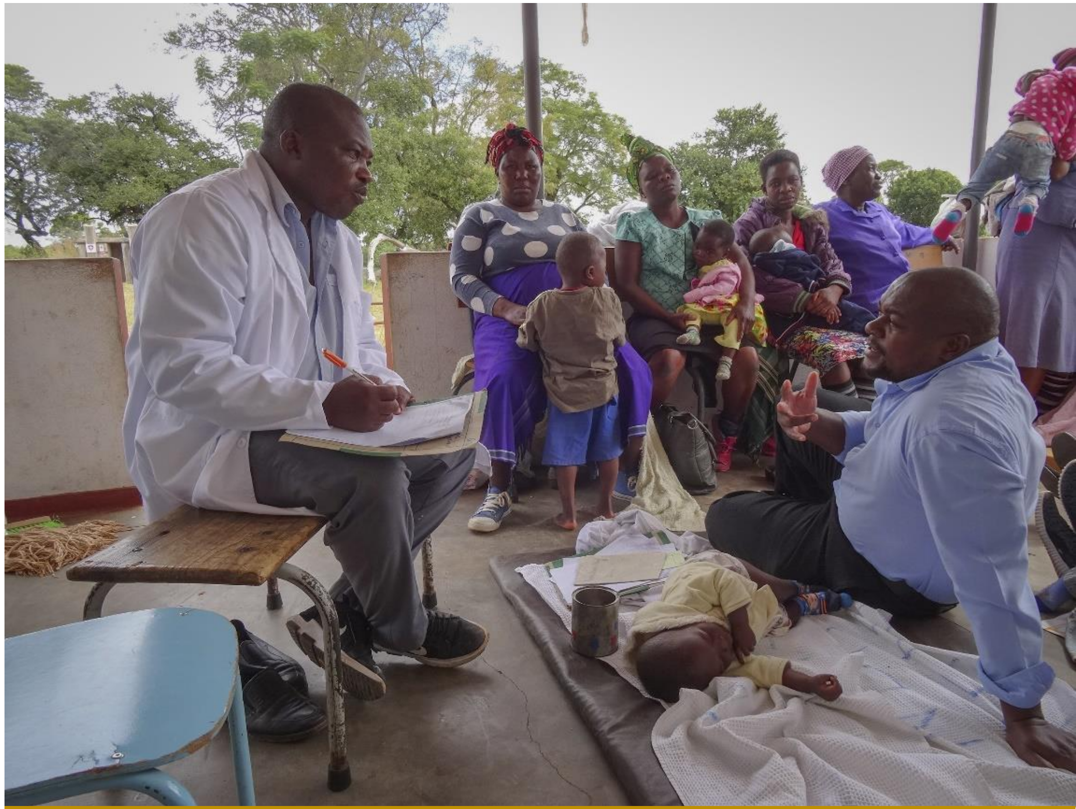
Our main objective as a foundation is to support parents/caregivers and local health care professionals in their work and care for these children. This project was an initiative of my daughter Willemijn, who has worked in Zimbabwe as a physiotherapist for three years.

In this newsletter you can read more about the work of the foundation and the local project that we are supporting. Also, you will find an account of the visit of Willemijn and myself to the project in June 2018.

We hope that this newsletter will give you a good idea of what the foundation does, as well as convey our own enthusiasm for this project.

We hope you will enjoy it!

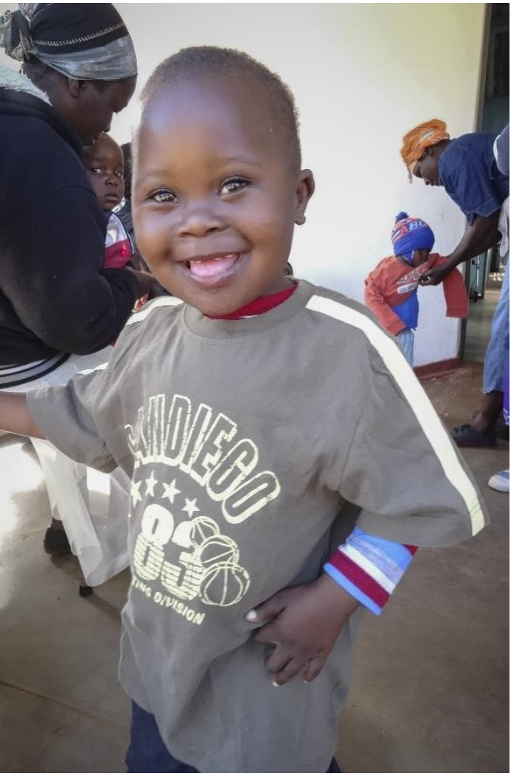
Anne-Miek Simons, chairwoman


Rehab technicians discussing a diagnosis

The Kufambatose Foundation

The Kufambatose – 'Progressing together' Foundation was established to support a special project in Zimbabwe, that was started locally in 2015 by Willemijn Simons-Rüttiman.

At the time, she was employed for three years by the Swiss NGO Comundo, to work as a physiotherapist in the Musiso Hospital in the Zaka district in Zimbabwe, in close collaboration with another local facility, Ndanga District Hospital. During these very special three years it became increasingly clear to her that there was a lot of work, which she did not want to just abandon after finishing her own contract. She decided to try and revitalise an old local project: the organisation of workshops for children with motor disabilities and their parents/caregivers. This project was to be carried out by the local health care professionals, in close collaboration with Willemijn. (You will find more information on the project itself further on in the newsletter.)



Soon, Willemijn's initiative proved to be a huge success and she couldn't bear the responsibility for it by herself anymore. That is when we, as family and friends, decided to establish the Kufambatose – 'Progressing together' Foundation in March of 2018.

As we speak, we have a board of five people and a volunteer, and we are trying to find more enthusiastic people to help within the foundation. Fun fact: the name Kufambatose is a suggestion of the people in Zimbabwe. It comes from the local language, Shona, meaning: progressing together, going the way together.

We want to progress together with the children, parents, caregivers and local health care professionals, to improve the quality of care and increase support.

Zimbabwe

Zimbabwe, with a population of 14,1 million people, is a country facing great challenges. The population is relatively young, and the HIV/Aids pandemic and lack of economic development still have enormous consequences. And at this very moment, the recently held elections cause turmoil once more.

Approximately 600,000 children with a handicap are living in this setting. Few of them are seen by health care professionals. These children often live in rural areas, in very poor circumstances. There is little knowledge to be found regarding handicaps, not even mentioning the rights and possibilities of these children. To have a handicap is like being branded: this must be witchcraft, or maybe a curse from the ancestors. As a result, child and parent may be excluded from the highly important living community. Great distances and the high costs of transport limit the accessibility of hospitals and health care centres. As such, these children remain under the radar of the health care professionals.

Our project

The foundation has adopted a project, which is dedicated to children with motor disabilities within the Zaka district, a rural area in Masvingo province, Zimbabwe.

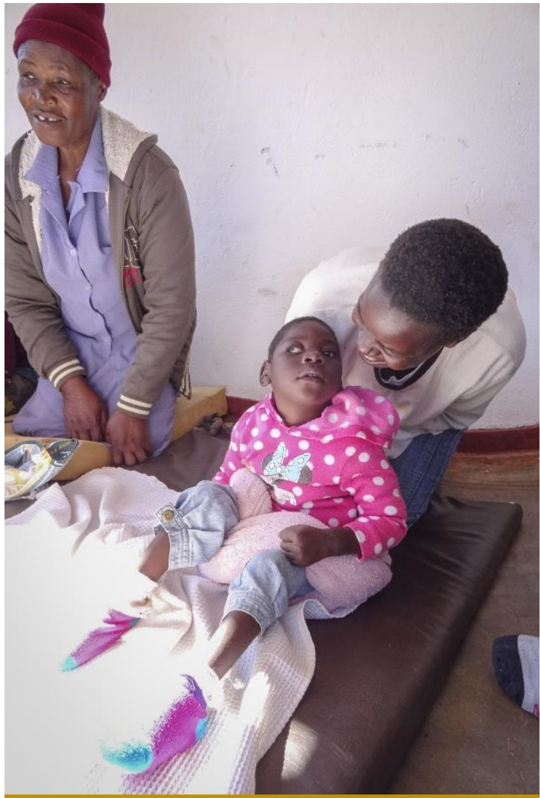
The project aims to:

1. Increase the standard of care for children with motor disabilities within the Zaka district.
2. Improve the social and economic development of these children.
3. Increase the knowledge regarding handicaps amongst both health care professionals and the local communities.

We regard the strong point of the project to be that its execution is completely in the hands of the local health care professionals and is embedded within local organisations and communities. The people in Zimbabwe indicate what is required and needed to execute the project and, maybe with time, even extend it.

For now, these are the project's main activities:

1. In June 2015, the CP (Cerebral Palsy) workshops have started. 20 children with motor disabilities and their parents/caregivers are monthly invited to the rehab department of Ndanga District Hospital, for three days.
   The purpose is to examine the children, inform mothers/caregivers about the diagnosis and origin of the disability, and supply them with exercises which they can do at home. After that, the children return every two months.
   2. Another point of focus is early detection/recognition of children with disabilities by specific training for other health workers.
   3. Participation in community meetings. This offers the opportunity to talk about handicaps freely, in a safe



A mother demonstrates how her child is now able to sit up with the help of a towel environment, so the taboo on talking about handicaps will hopefully decrease.

The execution of the project rests in the hands of the local rehab-team of Ndanga, since January 2017.

For more details about the project, please visit the website: www.kufambatose.eu/projectplan

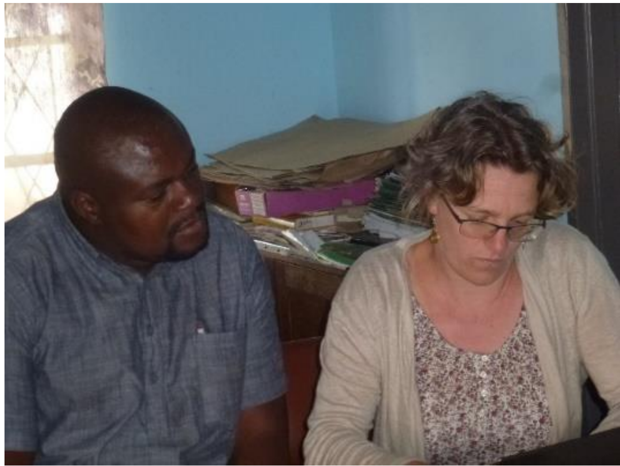
A visit to the project – June 2018

A personal report, by Willemijn and Anne-Miek Simons

Firstly, we met with mr. Samson Mazivazvose, the rehab technician of Ndanga District Hospital. He is the local coordinator of the project and the driving force behind it. He brought us up to speed with the current situation and we discussed policy together.

Samson is the local force behind the project, and we were struck by his motivation and dedication. To our question what moves him to invest so much of himself into this cause, he smiled and said: “It is simply my job as a rehab technician.” We don’t regard it as ‘simple’, we find his drive and dedication quite extraordinary.

Today, several meetings with local authorities were scheduled, such as Ndanga District Hospital, the (para)medic staff, en government authorities of Zaka district. And we especially look forward to attending the workshop, of course.

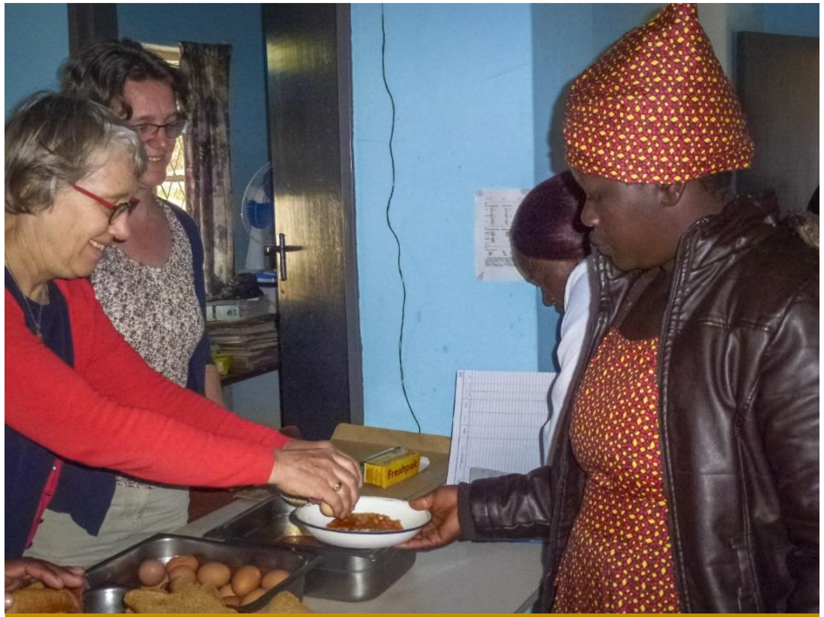


Samson Mazivazvose and Willemijn Simons

On Wednesday morning the CP-workshop started. Mothers and their handicapped children started to come in, with big bags full of stuff they brought from home: clothes for three days, plates and cutlery, cloths en blankets. The contacts among the women were immediately established and very lively; for some a truly warm reunion. The rehab technicians had also started to arrive by this time. We introduced ourselves and Samson translated bits and pieces into the local Shona language. We were greeted with enthusiastic singing and dancing, an incredible experience. After that, time to eat.

The mothers/grandmothers and children receive a meal four times a day during the workshop, such as polenta porridge for breakfast, tea and bread during the morning, and a hot lunch and dinner, often made with rice and for instance, chicken. For many this is a veritable feast. Depending on the harvest, most people eat once or twice a day. Good food is essential during the workshop. It offers the children, often undernourished, the opportunity to gain some strength. After all, much is asked of them during these three days.

In the afternoon, the home exercises were repeated within the whole group, so everyone could learn from each other's experiences. The progress of the children was very clear here and there, and the whole group applauded every achieved milestone. The people support and stimulate each other enormously, this is for all to see.


Distributing food

In this atmosphere, almost in between as it were, social issues were addressed. Samson had a real knack for bringing these issues forward. The problems often vary but have great impact. For example, mothers are cast out by their family or community. In a culture, where community plays such an important role, this is a huge deal. Some kids attend the workshop with a grandmother, because the mother has left. There are problems with income, with acquiring the proper auxiliaries, acceptance in school. The whole group listened attentively and offered support and advice, with great mutual respect.

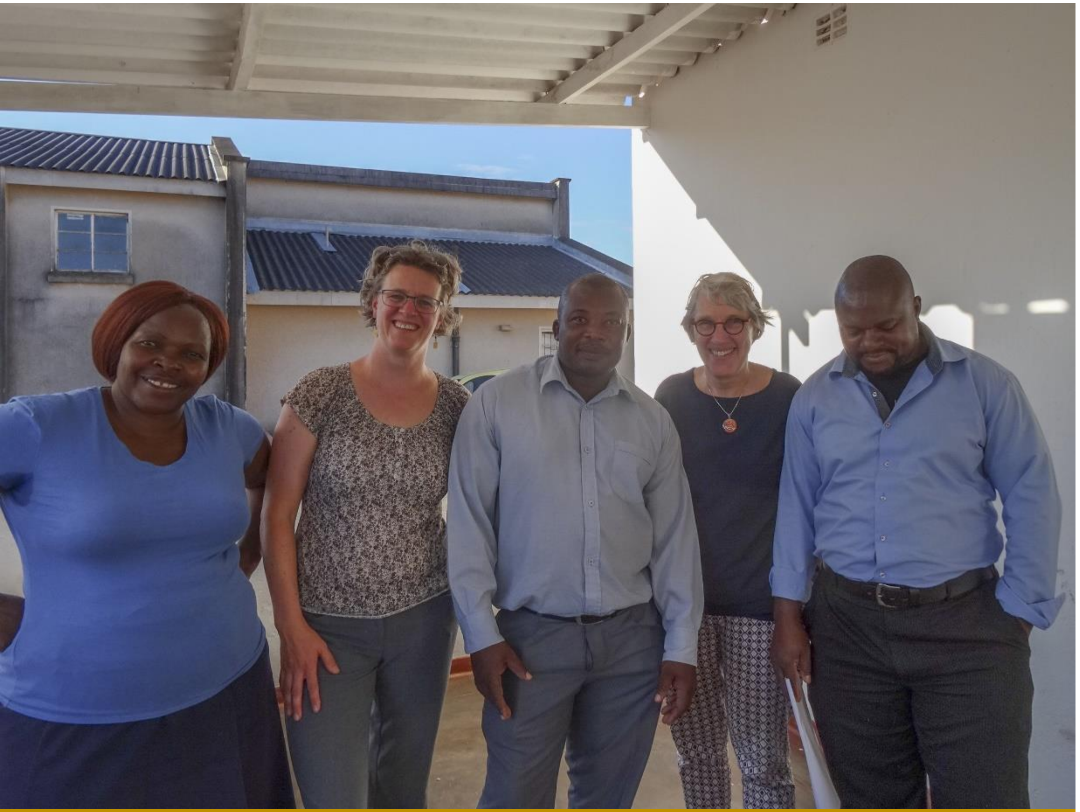
Key in these matters is also to try and get the mothers to think for themselves and together about ways they can improve their situation.

For the night there are two dormitories available to the mothers and children. These are supplied by the hospital. There is a foam mattress for everyone, and the participants of the workshop share one bathroom. As usual the toilet (a hole in the ground) is outside I a small stone building.

On the second day, attention was paid to where each child was in his/her development, so the new home exercises could be adjusted to that level. Also, new children were examined. All children receive a check-up on height and weight, and if necessary, they get concentrated food to take home with them.

Again, taking responsibility for their own situation is key, whether it is doing the home exercises, or trying to come up with possibilities to better one's own situation.

Three of the four rehab technicians are male. This we found quite special, because men/fathers rarely, or not at all, accept a handicapped child in a home situation. This is also one of the major social issues.



Part of the rehab team

And, like the day before, praying, singing and dancing graced the beginning and ending of the day, as well as all meals.

Our goodbye on Friday was also adorned with song and dance. The gratitude that was expressed by the people was very touching. Their cheerfulness and positivity, in their often difficult circumstances moved us deeply. What an impressive time we spent with them!

What was accomplished in the first six months of 2018?

- The Kufambatose Foundation was officially registered and acquired the Public Benefit Organisation status.
- We started building a website, which will be refined in due course.
- Alongside the two existing groups in the CP-workshop, a third group of children started in March of 2018. Every two months, sixty children now receive the care they need.
- During the visit to the project, we had numerous meetings with the local authorities. A Memorandum of Understanding was drafted, a form of contract which will be signed by all parties involved, in Europe and Zimbabwe. We agreed to look into the possibility to register the foundation in Zimbabwe.

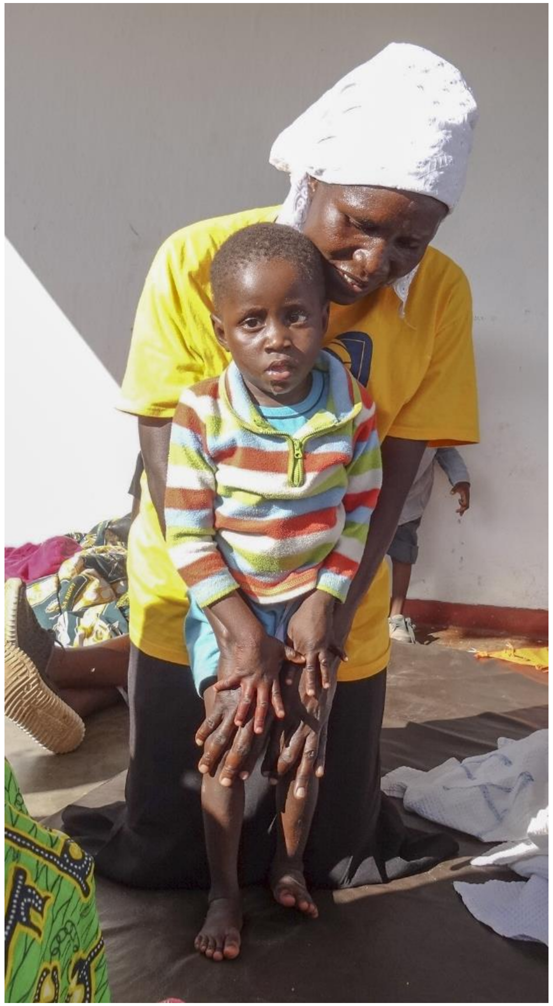
- We had talks with the Provincial Therapist and the Financial Director of Ndanga District Hospital about long-term safeguarding of the program within the hospital.

Plans

- Start of Community Based Rehabilitation (CBR), which is aimed at supervising children with disability in the home, early detection of children with risk of disability and the early referral of these children to a rehab department. An essential part in this is reserved for the Village Health Workers (VHW's.) We are looking into more training for these people.

During our talks with the people in Zimbabwe, they brought forward several issues that they consider to be of great importance:

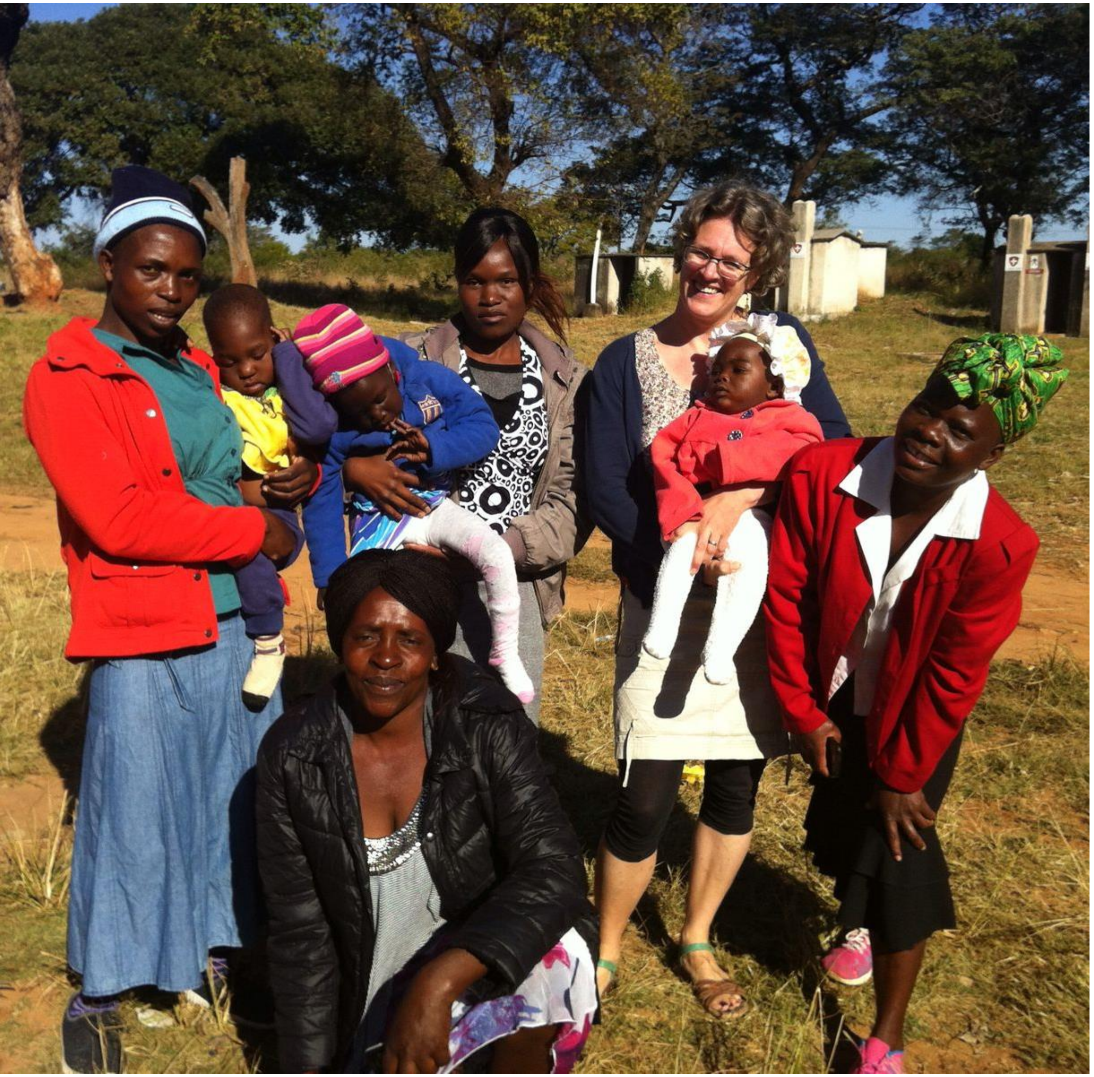
- The need for establishing support groups, in which parents can freely discuss their problems and develop initiatives to better their situation.
- The need for inclusive education; the integration of children with a disability in the local schools.



- A rehab village: the building of a number of huts near Ndanga District Hospital for lodging during workshops. We have asked the local partners to draft a sound plan for this, with clear bids (from local building companies). The foundation will then evaluate the plan.
- Income generating project. In this project, mothers are encouraged to better their economic situation by starting activities, possibly together, to earn money. The mothers will have to think about ways to achieve this themselves. The foundation will then see if we can facilitate them in realising their plan.

Finally, we would like to say, that we were impressed by the current functioning of the project. We are proud of the independence en dedication of our local partners and we have the utmost confidence in them. It was a wonderful experience to meet the people in the workshops and to see what has been achieved in this joint effort.

Willemijn and Anne-Miek



Conclusion

We would like to thank you for taking an interest in the Kufambatose Foundation. If you would like to learn more about us and the project in Zimbabwe, please check out our website: www.kufambatose.eu

And last but certainly not least: Thank you most heartedly on behalf of the children and their mothers/caregivers.

Maybe after reading this newsletter, you would like to make your own contribution to the work of the foundation. We are very happy with all support, financially or otherwise. Your financial donation will fully benefit the project.

Kind regards,

Willemijn, Anne-Miek, Jacques, Judith, Marcel, Claudia

The Kufambatose Foundation – Progressing together