

Armyworms and Rosette Disease Destroy Crops

Armyworms

A combination of native African armyworms and fall armyworms from the Americas are damaging staple crops across Southern Africa. They are so called because when they have ravaged a crop they march along the ground like a vast army of worms in search of more food.

The fall armyworm is an invasive species brought across the Atlantic. While pests such as locusts and African armyworms frequently plague Zambia, the fall armyworm is unique in that it is an alien species from outside the local ecosystem. It is both more aggressive and more pesticide-resistant than the African armyworm.

Although urgent research is ongoing, there is presently no proven pesticide that has been approved for commercial use. Experts say it could take several years to develop effective methods to control the pest.

Preventative methods such as crop diversification is being recommended as a way to reduce the risk of severe famine and economic crisis in the future. However, in Zambia, maize crops are the primary cash crop and primary food source for the majority of the country therefore it may take time to shift from this monoculture approach to farming.



Emergency supplies are being delivered to farmers affected by crop failure. Priority will be given to farmers on the Outgrowers scheme because we are already aware of their situation. Others will be helped wherever possible.

A combination of rosette disease, armyworms, and drought has in some areas almost wiped out the maize and groundnut crops. Many farmers using their last reserves of maize and food will run out by the end of the year. We predict that the period between January and March 2019 will be a time of real hunger.

We hope to start providing help immediately and delivering some supplies before Christmas. We will then assess the situation and decide what further assistance is needed.

The spread of armyworm has had a devastating effect on the African Continent. Rosette disease has been widely researched, and preventative measures such as crop rotation, pesticides, and planting at the correct time, have been effective solutions. Progress has also been made on developing new varieties of groundnuts which are more resistant to the disease. We are developing and distributing many of these new varieties this season and are hopeful that they will result in better and stronger crops in the future.

We are also encouraging people to be less reliant on maize which is seen to be more susceptible to armyworms. If they can successfully grow legumes then they can raise cash to buy maize for household consumption.

Food security is the main concern for rural farmers. Children are especially affected when their diets are deficient of essential nutrients. It is sad to see many children in rural villages suffering the long-term consequences of inadequate nutrition. It is a massive problem and we are working to help as many as possible who we know are suffering.



Silas and Mary Kamanga from Mphofu are typical of many families affected in the area. This farm supports 12 people.

Chizukwe

This small village in the Magawa region of the Eastern Province of Zambia is home to several families of believers. It is a typical rural community, where most rely on the produce from their small plots to feed their families. One Sunday in November when we visited them, we were warmly greeted by the hearty singing of a lively group of young and old. It was moving to hear songs of praise echoing across the hot and barren landscape. There was about 70 gathered together, including many women and children, all seated on mats under a makeshift shelter; at the front, was a table prepared for the Lord's Supper.



The assembly started in 1990 through the work of a brother Asaph Banda who, after being encouraged by a missionary from New Zealand, decided to return from the Copper Belt to evangelise his home village. This humble elderly brother is respected as a spiritual father and greatly revered in the community.

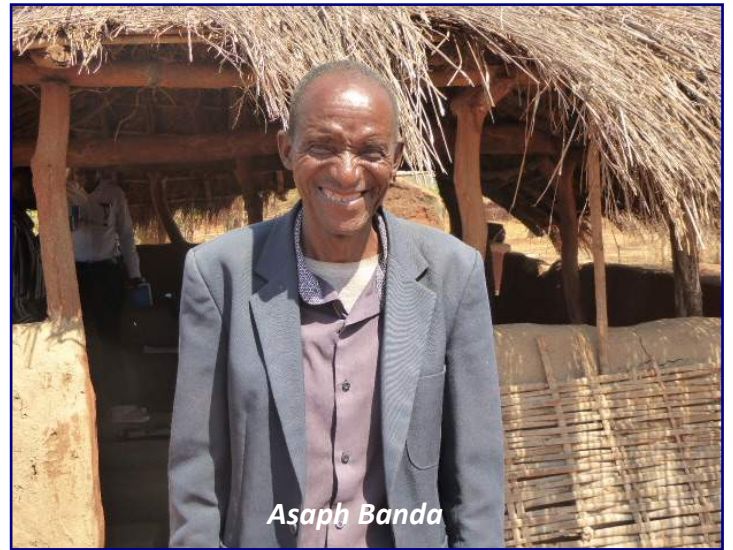
Although there were only two bibles and three hymnbooks among the congregation, many of the hymns had been committed to memory. They sing with a smile that cheers the soul and exults the Lord. Afterwards brother Mwewa (responsible for SHAREAfrica Zambia's (SAZ) farming projects) preached the Gospel in their own language.

These dear people suffer extreme poverty; conditions are harsh and food supplies are scarce. Some children looked malnourished and others slept on the ground throughout the meeting. During discussions afterwards, they told us of the hardships of farming small parcels of ground with few resources. None of them are on the SAZ Outgrowers scheme, as yet. We hope to be able to manage larger numbers in the future, including some of these dear believers. Meantime, we committed to provide seed for the upcoming season, for which they were most grateful.

We also promised 50 hymnbooks and bibles (In Chewa). These will be delivered on the next visit to their community.

Before leaving, Mr Banda said that their meeting place, a small mud structure with mud seats, had become too small and asked for a little help to build something more suitable. They intend to build it themselves, once we provide them with some cement and roofing sheets.

Please pray for the believers in this assembly and those in the surrounding areas. We were greatly encouraged by their interest and zeal. Remember brother Banda and others that seek to teach and nurture many of these first generation Christians.



New Shop in Chipata

We have rented a small shop in Chipata to stock herbicides and fertiliser, and to be a focal point for the SAZ activities in the area. We will also stock bibles, hymn books, and other helpful literature.

A young man, Ronald Phiri, has been recruited to run the shop and to help with the ongoing administration of the SAZ Outgrowers Programme. He is a believer in the Chipata assembly, one of 11 children. He has decided to work rather than go to college so that he can support the schooling of his younger siblings. He has been unemployed for some time in spite of his qualifications. We are pleased to be able to help Ronald and his family and trust that this new venture will be a benefit to many in the area.

As we look to further expand the work in this area, employing and training young people with potential, like Ronald, is a key objective.

Oxen Trial - measuring improvements in cultivation



Jonas and his wife Veronica have six children, the most recent being five-month-old twins. He is a hard-working farmer with more ground than he can cultivate. The person who helps support him through the farming sponsorship programme kindly bought him an oxen and a plough, which he is now using to cultivate his fields for the coming season.

For some time we have considered the benefits of oxen for farmers, particularly those who find it difficult to cultivate their land. Normally their capacity to cultivate depends on the labour available within their own household.

An 'acre' was originally defined as the area that could be ploughed by a pair of oxen (pulling a wooden plough) in one day. Jonas said that with the oxen he should be able to cultivate an additional 5 acres at least. By planting and selling soybeans or groundnuts, Jonas should also be able to recover the cost of the oxen and plough (about £1,000) in less than a year. This opens up greater opportunities for

Jonas and his family, and for the improvement of rural farming generally.

For centuries the plough has been the means of transforming subsistence farming into commercial farming. While the solution seems obvious, there are still many farmers who have resisted 'draft power' (like oxen) because of the effort involved in training and keeping the animals. However, a growing number of farmers in the Eastern Province of Zambia are able to see the benefits gained by those who have them, and would like to have similar opportunities in the future.

Although small tractors could appear to be more beneficial, this is probably a stage too far for many rural farmers. Costs are higher, fuel is expensive, and maintenance and spares would be a difficult. However, the possibility of shared automation (one tractor shared by 50 farmers, for example), is something we continue to consider, and could be worth trialing in certain areas in the future.



Jonas with his new Oxen

Distributing Seed at Kamlaza



Farmers at Kamlaza

Kamlaza is a new outreach about 5 miles from Chipata, the main city in the Eastern Province of Zambia. When we visited in March, we promised to provide seed for this planting season. Twenty-five gathered to be trained on how to grow groundnuts. They were also shown how to prepare the seed for planting by adding chemicals to help germination. These believers are not on the Outgrowers scheme but because we have extra seed, we are distributing where we can.

The outreach at Kamlaza is attended mostly by men. The women are refusing to come until they see genuine commitment from their husbands! We trust our visit will encourage the brethren to be before the Lord about establishing a permanent assembly in the area.

Orphan Programme Update

Kamwala

Kamwala assembly, located in one of the suburbs of Lusaka, was established in 1979. The number in fellowship has grown from 60 in 1990 to 450 in 2018. This encouraging growth has also resulted in the establishment of other assemblies in the surrounding areas.

When visiting Kamwala, one of the elders expressed gratitude for the work being done in support of the orphans in Kamwala. Speaking on behalf of the assembly, the elder said - "This long-term commitment made in the children's best interests, has been so good and gratifying. If the children on the programme had been placed in care, they would lose their rights to inherit their parents' properties. They would also face social difficulties, for the idea of belonging to a family or a clan is central to their sense of identity".

Presently there are seven children from the Kamwala assembly on the SAZ Orphan Support Programme.



Betty Mwansa

Betty 17, lost her father in 2002 and her mother in 2009. She remained in the care of her aged grandmother who subsequently died a few years later leaving her with a profound sense of loss and abandonment. Betty has become depressive, and now suffers from learning difficulties at school. She was also living alone with her cousin which was entirely unsuitable. Betty was a member of the assembly at Schobo.



Betty's aunt from Nampundwe has now agreed to take her under her care.

Need for Solace

Sondashi Jnr, Frank, and Gershom lost their father last August. Unscrupulous relatives claimed the small business stall with all the merchandise, which the orphaned children were legally entitled to inherit from their late father. The trauma of their fathers protracted illness followed by his death left the children with a deep sense of loss and neglect. They are left with their mother, surviving on hand-outs from believers in the local assembly. When a home visit was made to the family some material, emotional and spiritual assistance was appreciated by the family. Please pray for this vulnerable family.



Medical Support

We have sought medical help for 4 children on the programme.

Spider Nvula has been living with hearing difficulties for many years. Due to support provided, Spider is now able to pursue his education using a hearing aid. He is now preparing for his junior secondary school final examinations.



Belita Puta is another child being treated for a similar hearing complication. She has lived with the problem since 2013 when she was in grade six. She is now doing well and is in grade eleven.



Luka Phiri has had problems with his eyesight for some time. Arrangements have been made for Luka to undergo tests in the hospital to see if anything can be done to improve his sight.



Miriam Puta is another child with sight problem. It was discovered that she has cataracts in both eyes and will undergo an operation at the Lusaka eye hospital.

Food packs and Gifts

Nutrition food packs distributed to families



Food supplements have been given to 200 families. The initiative is to support the families caring for orphaned and vulnerable children. The food contains

many of the nutrients essential for the physical and mental development of these children. It has been well documented that a child with a full stomach has better memory retention than those who are hungry. They are also less prone to sickness and absenteeism.

During a follow up visit, Delphine Mulubwa from the Chawama assembly, an aged lady suffering from cancer and currently looking after nine orphaned grandchildren, said "The meals have helped by improving the health of people like myself and my family; the worry about daily food is no more." Delphine has a large heart but her health is a big concern. Please pray for her and her family - and some of the potential challenges they face in the future.

Gifts



Widows, widowers and relatives who take orphans into their own homes share many of the children's needs, especially for food, clothing and shelter. They have the extra pressure of ensuring the children in their care enjoy a proper family upbringing in a Christian environment. There is also an added financial burden placed upon them - which many of them struggle with. However, their commitment and kindness is a joy to observe and commends the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. One of the guardians recently said "I take my orphaned grandchildren to be part of myself, they are my strength. Whenever we receive any help of any kind, it benefits all of us in the family. We struggle to cope without help". Edrick, Vincent, Mary, Herald, and Gift are five of the orphans who have recently received gifts from sponsors and have asked that we express their sincere gratitude.

Feature Story

Chitani and Florence from Mgawa are small scale cattle farmers with 9 oxen, 14 cows, and one bull. They decided to rear cattle due to the risk of failing crops and not having enough food for the family. In emergencies they can always sell an animal.

The cows only produce milk when they calf. They are village cows that graze on rough grassland where there is not enough nutrients for dairy cattle.

Their greatest challenge is water. The nearest well is 4 miles away which means they must drive all the cattle there and back every day. Chitani cannot increase his herd because his calves would die for lack of water.

He has 30 acres cleared for grazing and 5 acres for crops, but his maize crop failed due to an infestation of armyworms. Occasionally Chitani will train oxen to sell, but with a limited herd, he can at best only provide one pair per year.

Sadly, this scenario is fairly common and presents many challenges. Moving to another location is not easy since good land close to a suitable water supply is scarce. Changing the grazing area into cultivated fields would require a significant amount of work, and still exposes his family to the risk of crop failure.

A bore hole on his farm would be a good solution but the cost is significant (about £4,000) and does not resolve the problems for other neighbouring farmers. A bore hole could potentially be justified by asking Chitani to use his knowledge and experience to rear oxen for other farmers. Whether other farmers are better qualified to do this or whether this location is the most suitable area for cattle breeding are a few of the key issues being considered.



Update from Mgawa



Elders at Mgawa

We had mixed feelings after meeting with the elders at Mgawa in the Eastern Province. While encouraged to hear that up to 500 attended some of the assembly gatherings, only about 30 are in assembly fellowship and Break Bread each week. Sadly, the remembrance meeting at many assemblies in Zambia is poorly attended. We were able to give a few words of exhortation, which the elders appreciated.

The underlying superstition within their culture has led many to conclude that some evil will befall them should they partake of the emblems unworthily. The need for biblical teaching on Church truth and many other practical topics is great. Please pray that God will raise up Zambian brethren to help meet this challenge.

We were encouraged by their zeal in the gospel. When not working in their fields, four brethren are regularly out in nearby villages preaching the gospel. They travel on bicycles and are given food to support them on their journey. Their efforts are being blessed.

One of the requests from the elders was that we increase the support packs for farmers. This is something we are looking into - it clearly has a number of obvious benefits but could increase dependency, which is what we really want to try and avoid, if possible.

The Farmer Input Support Programme (FISP)

The FISP, which is funded by the World Bank, amounts to a donation for each rural farmer of about £150 so they can buy agricultural inputs. To qualify the farmer must be registered with the District Agricultural Commission. The cost to register is about £33, which for many farmers is prohibitive. Once registered, the

farmer is given a card which they can use to draw down money to buy goods up to that value.

We are now considering setting up cooperatives for assembly believers and paying the registration fee from our support programme. This will give the farmers access to fertilisers that would be very beneficial.

Brother Mussa will coordinate this initiative and will provide a future update on its progress.



Smart Phones

We are still looking for used 'smart phones'. (Samsung Galaxy 3 or above). They are helpful in tracking activities in the rural areas. They can also be pre-loaded with a copy of the Bible in local language.

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