

Dear church friends,

February 2009

A rather belated Happy New Year to you all. I have been hearing about the cold weather you have been having and hope it has been enjoyable rather than stressful. Here in Zambia it is the rainy season, hot and wet; the torrential rain can sometimes be ankle deep, but generally it doesn't usually last very long; and although the rain is accompanied by a drop in temperature, it rarely gets below 20 centigrade

The current topic of conversation here however, is not the weather, but the economy and the increasing prices of food. The price of copper has plummeted so much that it may not be viable to keep open the mines, which are vital to the Zambian economy. Many hundreds of people have already been laid off, and many more are anxious about their job security, and of course this has a knock on effect those who work in other areas such as retail. There are noticeably less lorries rumbling along the road over laden with copper ore and other goods. Prices continue to rise in the shops and shelves are often empty. At present there is a shortage of maize meal, the Zambian staple for making Nshima, and, despite the government subsidies, the price is crawling back up over 70,000 kwacha for a 25kg bag (about £10.00) which will barely keep a family for a week. I must admit, my western taste buds have not taken to nshima in the same way most Zambians do. They say no matter how large the quantity of food you have on your plate, if you haven't had nshima you haven't really eaten. So culturally it is seen as vital, although nutritionally it can best be described as a "filler".

I was talking about this with Samuel, and trying to persuade him to look at pasta or rice as a



Cutting the cake

more economical carbohydrate instead. He remained, I think, politely unconvinced, although he did take a packet of spaghetti home to try.

Samuel, a lanky 6'3", turned 20 in early February, and has never celebrated his birthday. He was orphaned at the age of four, and left the care of his grandmother in preference for the streets aged seven, as her new husband beat him. From there he was picked up by

an orphanage where he stayed till he was almost eighteen. We arranged a small party, with a cake, snacks balloons games and presents and he was very happy. It is almost unthinkable for young people in the developed world to grow up without a card or present to mark their birthday, but it is often a fact of life over here.

After the Christmas break I began putting together a programme for the groups in Ipusukilo and

Kamatipa. At present we are in the middle of two tie and dye sessions with the people from Kamatipa. A local trainer is working with 2 sets of 10 people. We are



Dipping the tied cloth

encouraging each group to form a small co-operative, and hoping for friendly competition between them. When I met with them, the Ipusukilo women prioritised a workshop on home remedies above income generation, so I will be making a simple honey, lemon and glycerine cough mixture and a tea tree antiseptic cream when I return at the end of the month.

February also sees the beginning of the new academic year and the Pan African participants have come a far away as from Nigeria, Lesotho, Rwanda and Uganda. Though the Pan African contingent seems to shrink each year, campus will still be busy as MEF is running 3 other courses in social work, development and education. These are targeted specifically at Zambians, and have added over 80 to the numbers being taught this year.

Items for prayer

- The world wide economic situation, and especially its effects on Zambia
- The settling in of the new intake of participants
- Success in the income generation projects of the groups in Kamatipa and Ipusukilo

And praise

- For the safe arrival of all the Pan African students

With very best wishes to you all,

Jenny

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