

News from Zimbabwe

NEWS

Teacher-to-Teacher Project 2008/09

The letters from Matopo Primary School which I recently received paint a gloomy picture. 98%, that's right, 98% of Zimbabwean schools have shut down in the face of overwhelming disasters including economic collapse, the wide-spread cholera epidemic and starvation. Inflation has been estimated at over a quadrillion percent. A single egg costs \$35 billion. News that forex is now being accepted and circulated may or may not be good news. Most people haven't got any money of any kind.

Mind-boggling numbers, indeed. But the situation at Matopo Primary School is not entirely hopeless. Thanks to ETAS support, morale there has faltered but not disappeared. Patson Mpofu, the Deputy Headmaster, thanked us effusively in his letter for the materials we collected and shipped to the school last year (they particularly admired the T-shirts with phonetic symbols donated by OUP) and expressed his gratitude for my facilitation of the second Teachers' Workshop Day which took place on October 6th. Incredibly, Matopo is still fully staffed with teachers eager to begin the new term, despite the fact that there was no electricity or water.

From Patson: "Thanks for taking your precious time to be with us – helping us, encouraging us and uplifting our spirits... we remain hopeful. We will not give up!" As I read these lines I must confess they are blurred by the tears which well up. Patson also had these words to say about my husband, Peter, who took the marvellous photos some of you saw at the AGM in Chur and acted as my assistant and general dogsbody at the Matopo event: "Thanks to Peter your precious, handsome, kind, fatherly husband. He is... a living legend...". This praise has swelled Peter's head to unbearable proportions but its sincerity is not in doubt. How can I get discouraged in the face of such courage? So I'm determined to go forward with the project and not let Patson, the other teachers and the children down.

In concrete terms, here is what I'm hoping to achieve this year:

Spend a penny?

The entire school infrastructure has been badly in need of a total overhaul for years, but the most critical area at the moment is the repair and re-building of the 'Blair' toilets.

For those who may not be acquainted with this style of loo, a 'Blair' toilet is an outdoor cubicle which shelters, not to put too fine a point on it, a hole in the ground. Surprisingly, if properly maintained Blair toilets are quite effective at doing the job and not at all disgusting – I can personally attest to that. (In any case, flush toilets of the type we take for granted would be impossible in the arid climate of the Matopos.) The Blair toilets at Matopo Primary School were badly damaged in torrential storms a couple of years ago – it's either deluge or drought in this part of the country – and I've been anxious to tackle this project for some time. The problem is that even amidst all of the administrative chaos so prevalent now in Zimbabwe it's always possible that some civil servant could get wind (sorry!) of this state of affairs and come along and close down the school due to a lack of adequate facilities for the number of pupils. So re-building the Blair toilets is at the top of my list of priorities this year.

Team up with and sponsor a Matopo Primary School teacher

Another brainwave I've had concerns teacher training and support. I hope to continue with the annual Teachers' Workshop Days, but while these events have done a tremendous amount of good they're still only once a year. The fact that the teachers are left for the rest of the year without direct support has always bothered me, and I was discussing this recently with Brigitte Zulauf, an ETAS member and friend of mine, when we came up with a brilliant idea: long-distance teacher training by 'twinning' a Swiss teacher with a teacher from Matopo Primary School.

Many people have approached me at ETAS events and asked how they could get more directly involved in the project. Here's your chance to do just that. The idea is that a teacher here in Switzerland would volunteer



Matopo Primary School

NEWS



to partner a Matopo teacher with whom he or she would set up regular correspondence in order to exchange teaching ideas, stories, poems, and so on. The teachers at Matopo would be very grateful to receive worksheets and other materials to help them with their teaching, and the Swiss teacher would surely gain some insights from reading about the experience of teaching in Zimbabwe.

If you'd like to take it a step further, ETAS member Jane Coughlin has proposed the idea of sponsoring a teacher. A teacher at Matopo Primary School should get \$US 50.- per month, a paltry enough sum which they have not received now in many months.

The government is broke, except when it comes to lavishing extravagant goodies upon themselves, naturally. Until that situation changes, if you would like to sponsor a teacher's salary for \$US 600.- per year, it would be an enormous help. Of course, you can both be a teacher's 'twin' and sponsor him or her as well. I plan to do some recruiting for this endeavour at the SIG Day in Basel, but in the meantime if you're interested in participating in this project, please get in touch with me. (business@e-tas.ch)

I'm a bit concerned that the world's current economic crisis may distract us from remembering that there are places where life has been a struggle for survival for countless years. But I do hope that our commitment to Matopo Primary School will not weaken despite our own difficulties, which are, truth be told, very small compared to those in Zimbabwe. I'd like to thank all of you for your continued support for this very worthy project, in particular ETAS member Fay Rogers and her husband Raymond, who encouraged me to submit a proposal to the company where Raymond works, Cargill International SA. The company donated \$1,000.-.

Just what the toilets at Matopo Primary School need.

Cindy Hauert

www.matopoprimaryschool.blogspot.com

