

The Zambian Context

Zambia was under British Colonial rule until it gained independence on 24th October 1964. It is a landlocked country, bordered by eight countries - Angola, Botswana, Democratic Republic of Congo, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Tanzania and Zimbabwe. Some of these countries have had troubled political histories and Zambia is proudly a 'peaceful nation' by comparison. It is also proud that it is constitutionally a Christian nation.

At the general election in 2011 Zambia saw a change in the political party in power and was proud of doing so in a democratic way, without riots or violence. However, recently the economic situation is very fragile and media reports have been very critical of the government. The consequence of this is that there has been some unrest on the streets and more and more families are living in poverty and struggling to feed their children.

The capital of Zambia is Lusaka, which has a population of 1.4 million people. Most people in Lusaka live in *Compounds* (informal settlements – similar to the townships of South Africa) in very poor conditions. One of the main areas in which Footprints operates is Misisi Compound, which is said to be the 5th worst slum in sub-saharan Africa.ⁱ

HIV is prevalent and Zambia has the 7th highest HIV rate in the worldⁱⁱ. Good quality medical care is very expensive, with only two public hospital beds to every thousand people, and hospital staff being in short supply.

Education in Zambia is nominally free until Grade 8 but parents still need to pay for uniforms and other school items in order for their children to be able to attend class. Zambian schools are very strict and children are refused entry to class if they have the wrong shoes, if their hair is too long, or if their parents cannot afford the 50p contribution to classroom



cleaning products. There is no free schooling after Grade 8. School fees (payable in January) are very variable at the moment and we have seen significant increases year on year. In 2014 fees were in the region of £150-200 per year.

There are around 72 different languages in Zambia. Although the main languages spoken on the street are Nyanja and Bemba there are many children from rural areas and other countries who do not speak these languages. This can make it hard to communicate with organisations and authorities (luckily for Footprints, Vasco is able to communicate well in several languages).

Zambia's total population is 14.6 million, and 46.2% are under the age of 15 (66.2% under 25)ⁱⁱ. It has the 4th highest birth rate in the world and the 26th highest rate of maternal mortality. All of this means that there are a large number of young people in the country and not enough adults to care for them. Orphans are very common as are large extended family groups with several dependents and only 1 or 2 parent figures – this makes it very difficult for a guardian to feed and financially support the whole family.

ⁱ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Misisi>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/za.html>

Bless our children. Guide their elders. Guard their interests. Keep them safe