

# KING GEORGE VI CENTRE

Emails: [ihussey@kg6.co.zw](mailto:ihussey@kg6.co.zw), [dkatandika@kg6.co.zw](mailto:dkatandika@kg6.co.zw)

iThemba film trailers ; [www.vimeo.com/1625524](http://www.vimeo.com/1625524)

As a number of people have been asking how KGVI is managing I decided to write this report earlier than usual. I am going to struggle to try and explain the situation so that anyone can understand it! Basically the country has collapsed but somehow it keeps going. In August we removed 10 zeroes from our currency, three months later we have acquired more zeroes and our money is so valueless that no one will accept it. I have heard that inflation goes up by 50% an hour and you can believe it. You can no longer buy anything with cheques as the money devalues quicker than it can be put into a bank account. So everyone now demands cash but you cannot access any cash. For instance your daily bus fare costs 300,000 but you are only allowed to take 150,000 out of the bank per day. As an organisation we can take 1 million but then our bills are in the multi millions, billions and trillions. So illegally everyone now charges in foreign currency – Rands or USD being the favoured. Many companies will now accept payment in fuel coupons – but you needed the forex to buy them as well! What if you don't have access to foreign currency – well you don't get the goods. Recently the banks have actually run out of money (again) so people queue outside the bank over night to collect their meagre 500,000. Imagine telling people in your country that they cannot have access to their own money! So now people can have trillions of dollars in their bank accounts that they cannot use and that is losing value by the hour. We have so much inaccessible money in our account that at the present allowed rate, it would take us 1.7 million years to get it all out!! Yes, I actually worked this out!

So what are people doing? If you have family out of the country you might be lucky to have some forex; some people have resorted to barter but for far too many they are not eating. We visited a child the other day who had only eaten green boiled papaya that day. At KGVI our only option was to start giving **everyone** a cooked lunch – for many this is the only meal they will get in a day. This means that we have to find food for 370 people every day (children and staff) - an endless nightmare. We also had to find parents to come in and do the cooking on the school side and volunteers to help in the centre kitchen. The school already reports a noticeable change in the children's behaviour, from depressed and lethargic to lively and active. Maize meal is still available – if you have the forex. We also have a kind Governor who donates occasionally and even received *once* from the government scheme which promised to keep schools supplied. Beans we buy in Botswana, vegetables we buy in mixed money and meat we struggle to find and purchase. In fact it is only the boarders who get meat once a week – most Zimbabwean families are lucky if they eat meat once a month or ever.

It might seem incongruous to be feeding teachers but for the last two months they have been receiving an average salary of 17,000! While over the same period of time we have increased centre staff salaries by over 6000 %. In reality we are now paying teachers as well as centre staff and they all get extras such as maize meal and cooking oil when we can a) find them and b) pay for them. So at least they have money in the bank even if they cant get hold of it! Shops remain empty apart from the very few that have been licensed to sell in forex – here the queues are endless as this is the only place where food can actually be purchased. Which brings us to our latest worry – what do we do with our most at risk children these holidays. Many people are starving; cholera has broken out in most areas and even anthrax in one area where people are eating beasts that have died of the disease. Our lucky children are used to three meals a day, what will they find at home? We can send food with the urban children and visit them regularly but what about our rural children. We can send them with some food but by the time it is shared out with the entire family it would only last a couple of days. One child was heard saying we should not feed them so well so they can manage when they go home! We will keep some of our most vulnerable children for an extra week and try and bring them back a week early so they are only at home for 4 weeks. There are six children who should not go home at all but if we keep them here their families will abandon them.

Have we reached the stage where we need to take total responsibility, but we are not an orphanage. These are tough questions and everyone is so busy with their own problems they don't have the strength to tackle any more.

Amazingly enough all our staff have kept working. We are one of the few schools in the country with a full complement of teachers. Many schools have simply closed their doors, at some the kids go to school but find no teachers, others the teachers only teach at weekends for extra cash from parents. There has even been a rumour that all schoolchildren will be made to repeat this year! In the meantime our O level students who wrote in July have not had their results and probably never will. They are writing again now but without much hope of these exams being marked and returned either. I was approached by a far sighted Form 2 boy, Tatenda, who has asked if we can register KGVI as a Cambridge exam centre (exams from UK) rather than the local Zimsec exams. Sadly we cant do this as Cambridge wont have anything more to do with Zimbabwe until we once more become part of the Commonwealth. What future lies ahead – a good percentage of Zim children are getting no formal education, our exam system is failing and the universities are closed because staff are on strike.

Health care is similarly disastrous and hospitals have publicly admitted that they don't have food or drugs. Doctors and nurses are generally on strike although somehow our wonderful Sister Mguni still seems to persuade them to attend to our children. Medical supplies have been a nightmare for us this term as our long hoarded stocks have run down and anything you can find locally has to be paid for with USD or huge amounts of Zim cash (which is not available). We have a number of staff members with chronic conditions who cannot afford or find their drugs; hypertension, asthma and hormonal imbalances are just a few of the problems. We are thrilled to hear from JKZ , Netherlands that they have solved this problem for us! We are the lucky ones but for most people this is yet another impossible burden.

Reading through this I am depressing myself so I need to find some positive things to write. Goodwell has once again impressed us. He has taught himself physical science and even set up his own mini science lab for experiments. He even made copper sulphate and had it tested at the nearby blood bank and then tested our own drinking water. We invited a private school science teacher to visit and Goodwell so impressed him that he will be offered a place to do A levels at the school even if he never gets any O level results! So there are good things happening. There is another great story about Goodwell. The school choir was asked to sing the national anthem at a meeting of chiefs to be addressed by Mugabe. Goodwell coached the band and became their choir master looking very smart in suit and tie. At the event he was so full of confidence and authority that he was mistaken for the headmaster of the school!

Confidence has been the theme of our new English club formed to try and improve the English of our senior students. Goodwell, Energy and Honest have been helping to lead the group. We started the term with no one prepared to say anything and have ended up with a lively debate on whether it is better to educate boys or girls. It is wonderful to observe how quickly a personality will develop if someone takes notice and encourages. We continue to offer the children out of school activities although these days these are largely run by our own students, both past and present. Marvelous has a drama club, Prudence takes singing and dance lessons, Tawanda encourages our budding artists, Tapiwa encourages piano practise and Elecium works with the junior marimba band. This band is really working hard and have given some good entertainment at several public events. Elecium still plays with Liyana but spends a good deal of time grooming the new band. As art becomes more important to many students we are converting our old unused hydropool into an art room for both lessons and display of art pieces from former students. This will also allow us to convert the old art room into another independent living house. Yes, we are increasing again and need more space for next year when our boarding numbers will go up to 108 or even higher! As we give more support to our school leavers so no one leaves and we have no space at the bottom end for all the children on the waiting list. Next year we have three boys who will be starting A levels at local schools and two girls waiting for places in the local polytech college who will be helping out at KGVI while they wait.

The school continues to grow as every new applicant has a pathetic story and Percy Hadebe, the school head, has a very soft heart. We have a family of seven whose mother just died and whose father has abandoned them; we have a 12 year old, Nkosilathi, whose mother left for South Africa leaving the family in the care of a teenager. When Nkosilathi, who is disabled, tried to prepare a meal for his younger siblings he nearly set the house on fire. Then there is a child who is being fed and brought to school by a neighbour because his grandmother-guardian has left the country. The other day we were brought a family of 6 who had been orphaned and were not going to school, they are all cousins left in the care of a grandmother. The stories are endless and terrible. These children are not all physically disabled but are definitely socially disabled. As a result our small classrooms meant for the ideal number of 12 children now have to accommodate 20 or more. However it is wonderful to see character emerge out of these children once they feel secure and happy.

Despite all this misery we do have some hope and excitement in our lives. Liyana is definitely off to America at the end of December! They will tour California with the John Lennon bus company; this will include playing in Disneyland! They will then spend eight days doing shows in New York. The tickets are bought and the visas issued. We created quite a stir in the American Embassy as while applying for the visas the Consular staff asked the band to sing for them and the Ambassador. The journey and the whole tour will be filmed as part of the ongoing iThemba film project. This is creating much interest in America but has not yet been fully funded although we are very hopeful. For the band this is the ultimate dream and they are counting the days. They all have expectations some of which are in the process of being met, for instance Goodwell will be fitted for a new leg and Marvelous will finally get his electric wheelchair. Goodwell has dreams of attending an American university and he has already been accepted by the US Embassy preparation team for this. They will work with him while he does his A levels. We have great hopes that Liyana will make a real impact in America. They have so many important messages to bring – *don't forget Zimbabwe, good things can come out of Africa and of course, the old cliché – disability does not mean inability!*

So it is not all bad news! However we face next year with fear and uncertainty. There seems to be no solution in sight and conditions just get worse. We fear for the people of Zimbabwe and for our children, our staff and their families. How will they manage this holiday and how can we best support so many people next year? The plain truth is that without you we cannot! Thank you so much to everyone who has given us such wonderful support through this year. We are proud and grateful to be one of the few institutions still fully operational. Thank you for helping us achieve this.

**November 2008**

**Cost Comparison Table**

<b>Item</b>	<b>March 08</b>	<b>July 08</b>	<b>November 2008</b>
	<b>Z\$</b>	<b>Z\$</b>	<b>NB: isn't this nonsense!</b>
Foreign currency (to 1 GBP)	65 million	1.2 trillion	326 billion (add 10 zeroes to compare with July)
Fuel (5litres)	200 million	1.5 trillion	Rand 70
Bus fares (1 journey)	20 million	100 billion	Z\$ 500,000
Bus fares to KGVI (1 week)	400 million	2 trillion	Z\$ 5 million
Eggs – 1 dozen	48 million	900 billion	Rand 20
Meat (1kg)	45 million	150 billion	Rand 35
Mealie meal (10kg)	130 million	500 billion	Rand 100
Teachers salary	5 billion	2 trillion	Z\$ 17,000
KGVI weekly vegetables	1.3 billion	3 trillion	Z\$40 million + USD100

