

Garikai: the Pride of the Poorest of the Poor



Five years ago during the infamous Marimbatsvina Campaign, launched by government to clean up Zimbabwe, the shack dwellers of Masvingo were displaced by draconian measures that eradicated most informal settlement. Some of those displaced were finally given core houses on a patch of dry bushland on the outskirts of

Masvingo, which although undoubtedly better than their shacks were without any sanitation or solid waste collection. There was limited water with only a couple of communal taps for the 100 households that were resettled. Garikai became synonymous with the poorest of the poor in Masvingo, a place where no one was proud to belong. The residents of Garikai felt ostracised by the rest of Masvingo town, as their place was considered a filthy dumping ground. Litter was everywhere, and everybody agreed that if cholera was to start again, Garikai was the place where it would begin.

Enter a charismatic young Project Officer from Zimbabwe AHEAD, Canaan Makusha, charged with starting a Community Health Club in Garikai. Undaunted by the general malaise, he trained a facilitator to hold the sessions and she succeeded in mobilising 88 out of the 100 houses who joined the health club, meeting every week to discuss health issues. When we visited the area five months later, they could not wait to display their achievements and told us how they could hardly express the effect that Canaan's training had had on their community.



'Canaan is, how can I say ... he is like God, because when he came there was only death, and now there is life! We people in Garikai now know how to survive! Those people in town they now respect us and our place is not looked down on as a dump anymore.'

Smoldering in the October heat, we were borne along on a wave of singing women and conducted round the dusty little settlement to admire each tippy tap. We were infected by their own enthusiasm and sense of worth and we were by their achievements. Not a single scrap of litter was to be seen, each house had a tippy tap for hand washing and, unlike many informal settlements where even soap cannot be left out for fear of theft, every tippy tap had soap and water. They told us that 28 households had already built latrines and they were continuing to save so the rest of the settlement would have safe sanitation, but meanwhile they were practising 'cat sanitation' and burying their excrement. Each home had a vegetable garden, and some had ringed each vegetable bed with used used cans. As there were not enough cans to complete



We had come in the wake of a visitation from the two most influential WASH officials in the country, the Head of the National Coordination Unit, Mr Bernard Mashingaidze, and the Head of Environmental Health Training in Zimbabwe Mr Naboth Mawoyo, who had returned from a recent field visit raving about the achievements of the Community Health Clubs. After years of trying to influence the top officials to adopt the CHC Approach throughout Zimbabwe, this first hand experience of Garikai may at last be the advocacy trigger for scaling up the CHC Approach in Zimbabwe. They told Zim AHEAD that they would like the CHC methodology to be integrated into the existing training for Environmental Health Technicians throughout the country. With their enthusiasm for the CHC Approach, both Mr Mashingaidize and Mr Mawoyo have been invited to become Board Members of our organisation.

the design, they had even collected cans from the town, recycling the litter of the Masvingo residents. The effect of the cans and the carefully swept yards was almost like a Zen Buddhist garden, and the care lavished on this barren land was touching. All the women had joy in their hearts, were united in achievement and were delighted with the environment they had created.

