

Caia and Chimuara: Understanding the local context



History, geography and social dynamics

Both the town of Caia and the river-crossing site seven kilometres away are part of Caia District. They are located on the southern side of the Zambezi in Sofala Province. According to the most recent Census¹ in 1997, the district has 86,001 inhabitants, about 47,300 of whom are children. The locality of Chimuara is located in Mopeia District on the northern bank of the river in Zambézia Province. In 1997, Mopeia District had a population of 71,535 inhabitants, 39,344 of whom were children. Chimuara is situated three kilometres from the river crossing point. The main language spoken in the area is Macena, and a small percentage of the population speaks other indigenous languages and Portuguese.

Caia and Chimuara are in many ways typical of rural Mozambique. As in other parts of the country, this area was deeply affected by war in the 1980s. In some respects, the communities here have not fully recovered even after fourteen years of peace. Until the early nineties, the river crossing area – particularly in Chimuara – was a place where thousands of internally displaced people and refugees became concentrated and lived in difficult conditions. The United Nations reported that after the war, 5000 people who returned or arrived for the first time in Mopeia

District had been refugees in Malawi avoiding the armed conflict in Mozambique. An estimated 20,000 people were displaced inside Mopeia in 1992.² Newcomers and the host communities here have co-existed with some difficulty although there were no reports of significant disputes or violence over land or water after the war ended. However, some land that had once belonged to displaced or refugee families was subsequently occupied by new families during their absence. This has caused some social tension in the community.³ The war and

¹ A more recent census has not been conducted by the Government of Mozambique.

² United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees/United Nations Development Programme (1997). "District Development Profiles: Mopeia District Zambézia Province", p 3. Maputo. December.

³ Ibid., p.4.

post-war period have altered family and social dynamics in Caia and Chimuara because of the arrival of people external to this area, including children with no families of their own. This has put some strain on the communities that have taken extended family members into their homes because they already experience poverty and struggle to provide for their own families.

Economy, employment and development

The inhabitants of Caia and Chimuara are dependent on small-scale subsistence agriculture to provide for their families and earn income. The most important crops in Mopeia and Caia districts are maize, sorghum, mexoeira,⁴ sesame, cotton and rice. According to interviews with local children, the sale of products from family plots of land known as machambas⁵ is the main source of the income generated in over 50% of the homes although other evidence would point to a much higher figure.⁶ Some residents also depend on fishing. Informal trading, particularly on the Chimuara side, also contributes to livelihoods. In some cases, adult males in the household have jobs as civil servants or as employees of the electricity plant in Chimuara. There is also a trend towards selling wood in these districts, which has become a lucrative business for some. The interviews with children also revealed that more than two-thirds of them work in order to sustain the family. The activities involve farming in the machambas, small-scale commerce, providing services in the commercial settlements by the river known as 'barracas'⁷ and doing 'ganho-ganho'. Ganho-ganho is an activity involving informal work and errands generally paid on a daily basis, usually with money but sometimes in food. Most children in Caia and Chimuara who do this regularly have lost a mother or father.

The town of Caia has a better developed infrastructure overall compared to its neighbour across the water. Caia and Chimuara both sit on the path of the National Highway Number One (EN1). The highway, which connects the southern, central and northern regions of the country, meets the river on either side due to the recent road rehabilitation. This area is also home to a ferry service, which carries large volumes of traffic to the other side. With the increase in road traffic beginning in the late nineties, the area has also registered growth in commercial activities. Many informal traders and business owners have established barracas, crude guest houses and vending stalls along the river for the purposes of providing goods and services to large transport companies and other motorists passing through.

According to a 2004 poverty and social impact analysis of the Zambezi River crossing project funded by the government of Sweden, the region has started to benefit from several infrastructural development projects in recent years – some already completed and others in planning stages. Chimuara now has access to rural electrification. Caia town depends on a diesel-run generator to provide power for a few hours each night to residents. In December 2005, the generator provided approximately three hours of power in Caia per day. There are also water supply programmes benefiting the communities in Caia and Chimuara. The rehabilitation of the railway (Linha de Sena) is scheduled to begin in 2006 and will likely hire local labour. The Planning and Development Office of the Zambezi Valley has prepared several projects for the sub-region with special focus on agricultural development, animal husbandry, fishing, forestry and wild life, trade, transport and communications.⁸

⁴ A type of cereal indigenous to Africa and widely consumed in Mozambique.

⁵ Small plot of land generally farmed by individual families.

⁶ In early 2005, Save the Children interviewed 120 children ranging in age from seven to sixteen from Caia and Chimuara to learn more about their situations. Most of the children who we spoke to were in primary school, but some others were out of school.

⁷ Informal road side beerstalls and restaurants which are pervasive throughout Mozambique.

⁸ Akesson, G. Poverty and Social Impact Analysis in Connection with the Zambezi River Crossing Project at Caia, Mozambique: Part 1 of a Preliminary Report, p. 6. Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), 2004.

According to community members interviewed on both sides of the river, food insecurity is the most pressing issue in their lives.

Difficulties facing the communities

As was highlighted above, some progress in development and improvements in quality of life have been made possible by local and outside efforts. However, children and their families face ongoing insecurity and hardships resulting mostly from chronic poverty, but also because of unequal gender relations, and a gradual but steady weakening of family and community structures. These daily struggles are manifested in many forms. A child interviewed in Chadimba, a small village close to Caia, described his observations of poverty:

Poor people are those who do not have the necessary support. Their clothes are worn and dirty. They work for food or money from other families and their children do not go to school. Poor people cannot find things such as food, clothing, and they live in poor houses.

According to community members interviewed on both sides of the river, food insecurity is the most pressing issue in their lives. This is aggravated by weather patterns leading to hot and dry conditions making it difficult to grow crops. This affects the availability and diversity of food throughout the year. At the end of the rainy season, there is more variety and a greater abundance of crops. However, during this more plentiful period some families must sell their produce to earn income to purchase

goods and end up with inadequate crops for their own consumption. During the dry season, few varieties are available and amounts of food diminish quickly. This is when the situation becomes particularly critical for residents. Occasionally, there are natural disasters such as droughts, floods and cyclones. A flood in 2001 hit this region of Mozambique particularly hard and displaced 70,000 people from their homes in the Zambezi River Valley. There is also a problem of pests. For example, cattle farming has been limited by the presence of tsetse flies.⁹

Food insecurity is also caused by families having insufficient time to farm their own fields. This is most evident in single parent households or those in which family members are sick and therefore struggle to grow their own crops. Adults and children are often required to find other means outside of agriculture to provide for the household. People in Caia and Chimuará are sometimes forced to work as labourers with food serving as their only payment. As a consequence, the people who are working for food do not have sufficient time to manage their own fields. Thus these families have few possibilities to establish long-term sustainability of their own production. In such a situation, children and youth are the ones suffering most according to the poverty and social impact study.¹⁰ The possibilities of going to school dwindle and children can be forced into situations of exploitative labour.

⁹ UNHCR/UNDP. (1997) District Development Profiles: Mopeia District Zambézia Province, p. 14. Maputo.

¹⁰ Nilsson, Anders. "Conflict analysis regarding two infrastructure projects in Mozambique." Department of Peace and Development Research, Göteborg University. March 2004

One result of this food insecurity is high levels of chronic malnutrition. Of those children interviewed by Save the Children in February and March 2005, 37.8% had only one meal a day. Children from this area typically eat maize porridge with vegetables. When it is available, children will sometimes eat fish, fruits, corncoobs, sugar cane, manioc, sweet potato and inhame.¹¹ A thirteen-year-old from Chimuara who is not presently attending school described his desire for meat in his diet. He said, "If my family would have the means, I would like to eat rice, chicken, goat and pork." In December 2005, residents of Caia and Chimuara reported the food situation to be critical. Some people have resorted to eating 'aquatic fruits', a sour food found in the river that is low in nutrients and toxic if not prepared properly.

Orphans and vulnerable children

There are reports of an increase in the number of orphans and vulnerable children (OVCs)¹² in the area. In 2002, there were an estimated 5824 orphans out of a total 47,300 children in Caia District.¹³ A District Education official in Caia believes that the number is much higher today though he does not have official statistics. Save the Children did not find a recent figure for the number of orphans in Mopeia District. There are more orphans and vulnerable children reported in Caia than Chimuara.

Save the Children interviewed a member of the local council in Chimuara about the situation of orphans. He explained that:

There is no care for orphans here. Adults treat them with contempt and when no one helps them, they are cut off and left vulnerable and begging. Orphans suffer all types of violence and abuse of their rights.

These children do not have any protection from family and even less from friends and neighbours. They take the blame upon themselves when they are abused or violated. They say nothing, maintaining silence because of shame. Orphans encounter various problems here. They sleep rough, without blankets, without food, and they live to do sex work at night with older people and run all sorts of risks.

Unlike the reality of some homeless orphans found in cities, orphans in Caia and Chimuara are generally taken in by relatives such as aunts, uncles and grandparents, and sometimes by other families not necessarily related to these children. This is beneficial because they are provided with shelter and food. However, as was mentioned previously this situation adds a financial strain on already impoverished families. It also creates pressure in turn on these children since they are then regarded as a burden that the original family cannot carry. However, not all children who lose both their parents are adopted by their relatives. A group of adults interviewed in Caia District told Save the Children that: "When the parents of a child die some of the other family members seize their goods but do not take care of the child. The neighbours then have to take care of the orphan but it is difficult to do this as they themselves are in need of help."¹⁴

Child labour

In interviews with children, 77% indicated they do some form of work that contributes to household income or food production. Children work in the family fields (machambas) and have domestic responsibilities such as cooking and cleaning. Fifty-seven percent of them practice 'ganho-ganho' or informal sector employment.

¹¹ Generic term for plants producing groundnuts.

¹² An orphan or vulnerable child can be described as 'a child under 18 years of age whose mother, father, both parents or primary caregiver has died, and who is in need of care and protection'.

¹³ Sofala Orphans Database. Provincial Directorate for Women and Social Action. Mozambique, 2002.

¹⁴ Save the Children Alliance. Mitigation of HIV/AIDS Impact on Orphans, Vulnerable Children and their Families. Chimuara and Caia Baseline Study: An Annex to the Save the Children Overall Baseline Survey, 2005. The data is based on a survey of 300 households in Caia and Chimuara.

The most frequently occurring diseases in children are malaria, acute respiratory infections and diarrhoea, which is sometimes a sign of malaria.



Examples are going from house to house to pound maize, repairing toilets and selling fish, flour, fruit and other products by the river. Children are more likely to work, sometimes at the expense of attending school, if they live in a household with unemployed or ill family members, or in households headed by women. Some children who work for barraca bosses are involved in heavy labour. They are required to carry large bricks and construction materials, and fetch water in big pots. They often work long hours without a break. There are also high levels of unemployment, particularly among young men and women in the area.¹⁵ (The existence of child labour at the river settlements and in workers camps will be discussed later in the report.)

Health issues

The most frequently occurring diseases in children are malaria, acute respiratory infections and diarrhoea, which is sometimes a sign of malaria. In adults they are malaria, pneumonia, anaemia, tuberculosis and sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). Caia and Chimuara are located in the hydrographical basin of the Zambezi River, which offers a perfect breeding ground for mosquitoes. Children interviewed in Caia and Chimuara also talked about toothaches, earaches, abdominal pains and chest pain. Seventy five percent interviewed in early 2005 have their illnesses treated in the rural hospital in Caia. Some residents visit traditional healers to cure illnesses. A 15-year-old boy

from Chimuara said, "I often have headaches, and pains in my belly, my leg and in my neck. I normally go to the hospital and there they give me chloroquine. When they give me pills I take them and go to sleep."

A health official in Chimuara described the local clinic as being understaffed. He added that the clinic itself was in poor condition and needs an enlarged facility with a maternity ward and new lab equipment for testing of diseases such as HIV/AIDS and malaria.

Education and premature marriages

As is the general trend throughout Mozambique, there is a problem in Caia and Chimuara of children dropping out of education before completing the 5th grade in primary school. This situation is particularly serious in terms of girls leaving school prematurely. This is often attributed to a necessity for children to work in the family machambas or provide other sources of income to the household which reduces available time for attending school. In Zambézia province, the gross admission rate to the fifth grade among children is 15%, which is low compared to the southern provinces.¹⁶ In 2003, in Mopeia District, 40% of the students in the 1st to 5th grades were girls. This number of girls dropped to 19% in later grades. In Caia District, the same percentage of girls attended the 1st to 5th grade while only 16% attended later grades.¹⁷

¹⁵ Akesson, G. op.cit. ft 12, p.8.

¹⁶ The gross admission rate is the total number of students enrolled in a specific grade, regardless of age, over the age-specific population.

¹⁷ Akesson, G. op.cit. ft 12, p.53.

Some girls also leave school early due to premature marriages. They are generally promised in marriage for two reasons, which can be interrelated. One is attributed to the traditional system of polygamy practiced by some families where men can have several wives. In Caia and Mopeia, marrying more than one girl or woman is still considered a symbol of prosperity.¹⁸ The other reason involves parents and families offering their daughters to men to help alleviate their own situation of poverty. Quite often, girls are given to men who are considerably older.¹⁹ Yet not all early marriages are supported by a girl's family. One community member in Chimuara explained that, "The men now take girls without the consent of the family and put them in their homes to pass off as their wives. This is done without any guidance and eventually what takes place is that they are divorced." In the town of Sena located in Caia District, some girls leave school as young as 12 or 13 years old to marry or move in with the 'Ndadjanjis'. The 'Ndadjanjis' are youth who engage in informal commerce in the area and can sometimes offer girls more financial stability than they have at home.

The children interviewed also expressed some dissatisfaction with school conditions and facilities. They explained that their schools are in short supply of materials such as desks, blackboards, pens and notebooks. Others said they did not like having schools made of

sticks and mud because the rain leaks through the roof and makes them wet during classes. They also mentioned that some teachers beat children who did not do their school work. Some children also complained about a lack of play activities and facilities in Caia and Chimuara inside and outside of school. Boys in particular are also known to watch violent and pornographic²⁰ movies in the video clubs. Some children loiter in the barracas at night. A child living in Caia elaborated on this:

We don't have fields where we can play different kind of sports such as volleyball, basketball and football. We do have a rough pitch, but that is not enough. The club pitch that exists is not good. The lack of entertainment means that the disco in the barracas is the only place where one gets together during the weekend.

All the persistently difficult conditions stated above account for many of the hardships facing children and their families. Upon closer examination, however, this does not provide a complete picture. As highlighted earlier, the presence of large infrastructure and development projects in the area – particularly the ferry service – have created a dangerous situation for children. They are subjected to many forms of abuse and exploitation at the hands of motorists, workers and the barraca owners who employ them.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 40.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ The manager of the video club at the Chimuara river settlement said children were denied entrance into pornographic videos that are shown after midnight, but others told Save the Children that children do in fact watch these movies.