



# Sewpportive Friends

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*Please join us in our journey to empower women in Africa through healthy, handmade feminine care products and the education to produce their own.*

## LIVE FEARLESSLY

"Allow yourself to be who you are. Shine your light as brightly as you can. And, go out and live your life fearlessly." A powerful quote by world renowned speaker and best selling author of the book *Dying To Be Me*, Anita Moorjani.

2020 has been a year of challenges, uncertainty, change, growth, and gratitude. Everyone has been impacted physically, emotionally and spiritually. Communication with African friends and communities has continued weekly - sometimes daily. The need for feminine hygiene items is still in great demand. Masks are now a new necessity which many sewing groups added to their production with the limited supplies left in their inventory.

We had three planned mission trips to Africa (Uganda, Zimbabwe and Zambia) in 2020 which had to be postponed with no reschedule dates as of now. The inventory of supplies (feminine pad kits, fabric and other sewing supplies) is organized, packed and ready for delivery. We are ready and excited to see our friends in 2021 if safe travel allows.

Personally, my physical health has been good during this pandemic and my job made provisions to work remotely during lockdown. Yet, I was challenged with emotions - uncertainty, concern for family and friends near and far, the limited availability of basic necessities, and more. Trying to stay positive was a struggle.

Finding daily peace and motivation was a necessity for me. A friend recommended a few great authors and philosophers

which lead me to Anita Moorjani and her life story. Her beautiful story and change in outlook was the inspiration to get me back on track. "Recognize your own magnificence and live your life fearlessly." A simple yet difficult action when surrounded by uncertainties. However, a thought that I have incorporated in my morning routine to keep me focused and energized for challenges that might arrive.

What keeps us connected? Love, compassion and the willingness to lend a helping hand. Exactly what Anita Moorjani shares.... Be who you are - love yourself and shine brightly, live life with strength and conviction to what you believe in.

Covid-19 has exposed the frailties and the strengths of each of us. It's time – to move forward, follow our passion, and live fearlessly.

Our friends in Africa have been challenged with the virus this past year, and some have struggled with lack of food, medicine, and basic life needs. Another year of drought conditions have impacted their farms or personal gardens forcing them to rely on the government for food, which was not always available. Also, remote learning was not an option for many of the communities. Friends shared that they feared there would be more deaths due to starvation than to the virus.

Our African friends shined brightly this year with love, compassion and community support.

Wishing you a very happy and healthy holiday season.

With love and gratitude,

*Julie*

## The New Vocabulary of 2020

When we rang in 2020 as our new year, who thought that our daily conversations would include new phrases and words like social distancing, wear your mask, and sanitize your hands. Not seeing everyone's beautiful smiles is a hardship for me, but I now notice that friendly twinkle in everyone's eyes!

Another term that was learned by those outside the science field was PPE, personal protective equipment. Sewpportive Friends has visited and aided the Sianyanga Primary School in Zimbabwe for many years, in addition to carrying on our mission of teaching to make, and providing, feminine protection. When we were asked to help them with their needs for PPE so that the school could open, our friends who sponsor children at this school really came through! We were able to assist them with purchasing gloves, gowns, booties, tarps, hand sanitizer, liquid soap, hydrogen peroxide and elastic so that they could use their sewing skills to make masks! The school was able to safely reopen because of this kindness.



I wish everyone a happy 2021 and that our vocabulary returns to smiles, hugs and kindness.

*Margie Bower*



*The following is an article written by a dear friend, Alpha-Arnold Nyathi, who lives in Zimbabwe. He asked how he could help Sewpportive Friends. We asked him to share life in the remote communities during 2020. **Learning, connecting and working together.***

### A GLIMPSE INTO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC SITUATION IN ZIMBABWE

Written by: Alpha-Arnold Nyathi



Zimbabwe, like any other country in the world, has not been spared from the wrath of the deadly world pandemic, coronavirus, or covid-19. The country entered into a lockdown period from March 2020 till date, with the government promising to further tighten the lockdown. Zimbabwe was hard hit by the pandemic as it was

found not just unready but grappling with a string of economic crises that has recorded a staggering 95% unemployment rate since the early 90s. Covid-19 saw the closure of many businesses ranging from small and medium enterprises to well-established industries that one would say the tourism industry was the most affected, further worsening the situation. The article seeks to delve into challenges faced by Zimbabwean rural communities, also reflecting their realities and experiences during the country's lockdown period following the World Health Organization (WHO) directive.

The cost of living in Zimbabwe has for the longest period of time (many, many years), on average been concerning and too high due to tragic levels of monetary inflation that are extremely crippling the economy of the country as a whole, evident even 'before' the outbreak of the corona virus pandemic. The cost of living distress already mentioned above was therefore not an exception and even worsened during the covid-19 pandemic outbreak. After the corona virus outbreak, the cost of living skyrocketed even further and continued in an upward trend and a lot of Zimbabweans were affected by even higher cost of living disadvantages to a very tremendous and extreme impact on their average standards of living.

Chisuma Community is located in Zimbabwe's Matabeleland North Province. The area is classified under region 5, characterized by low rainfall and high temperatures making farming less productive hence relying on curio curving and street vending. The community, therefore, relies on the Victoria Falls tourism industry whose fame and productivity were blown off by the pandemic. Since the WHO called for the total closure of all borders, the influx of tourists seized and many tourism companies in Victoria Falls laid off most of their workers leaving most families destitute as breadwinners lost their jobs contracts. This had detrimental effects on the lives of Chisuma community inhabitants. The effects ranged from food security to boredom as the WHO forbade any kind of social gatherings and demanded adherence to social distancing guidelines. The pandemic also saw the closure of schools countrywide in a bid to try minimizing and containing the virus as they were seen as epicenters of the pandemic.

Due to the closure of borders, most of Chisuma business moguls who previously relied on importing goods from Zambia resorted to smuggling commodities into the country. Chisuma also recorded higher crime rates during the lockdown period, most of them being stock theft and break-ins which can be attributed to the loss of jobs due to the nation-wide lockdown. Moreover, numerous early marriages were seen as many young female students fell pregnant during the lockdown period.

Looking at Tinde and Binga Communities, also falling under Matabeleland North Province. Female students fell pregnant as they did not manage to attend classes for quite a long time. Most businesses were ordered to close until the covid-19 pandemic was curbed and this led to indefinable financial distress and

financial problems for a majority Tinde and Binga community inhabitants. When it comes to health and medical facilities, most hospitals are incapacitated to accommodate at least four hundred patients at once and the country has been failing to provide basic medication for its citizens. As doctors and nurses declared incapacitation during the lockdown period, many citizens died in queues waiting for medical attention and some at home. Not much effort and support in terms of free face masks and hygienic sanitizer supply and distribution from the government were received throughout the national lockdown and coronavirus outbreak. With respect to employment proceedings, many workers lost their jobs as companies failed to pay their employees due to the forced closure of businesses caused by a coronavirus.



With respect to the Chezhou and Mambanje Communities that also fall under the geographical scope of the Matabeleland North Province in Zimbabwe. The covid-19 lockdown restrictions discouraged the economic growth of businesses as curfews were set for the closing of shops way earlier than usual. Death – a few death cases were recorded whereby the coronavirus was suspected to be the root cause as the victims showed strong symptoms that are highly attributable to the deadly coronavirus. International trade was discouraged as borders were totally closed for so, so long. Poverty was magnified more than ever as the covid-19 lockdown restrictions fuelled enhanced job retrenchment exercises due to the failure of companies to maintain salaries of employees that were risking their lives to work under harsh and life-threatening Covid-19 conditions. Churches were closed and this weakened the interaction of members with God (spiritual needs were suppressed in a major way). High demand for domestically produced goods leading to theft. Inflation since some businesses took advantage of the closing down of others. Extreme increases in domestic violence. Family ties were broken between local citizens and their relatives that are abroad.

Increase in the number of teenage pregnancies and abortions. The learning process was delayed as educational institutions were closed. Most activities were done online and this disadvantaged the majority of the students that couldn't afford

data bundles to log in online to access learning materials and lectures that were posted online by teachers, tutors, and lecturers. High rates of crime. School terms distracted. Excessive drug and substance abuse. Gender-based violence. Increased rates in prostitution. Deprivation of social activities, for instance, going to church, visiting friends & relatives. Economic crisis. Unemployment i.e. people were on lockdown & there was shut down of numerous companies. The distraction of infrastructure including the likes of looting and distraction of shops which lead to shortages of commodities as they had been looted. Poverty extremes as citizens didn't have the money needed in order to purchase food for their daily consumption needs. Hunger and suffering leading to loss of life. Loss of business, leading to loss of profits by firms and also there was the expiring of many products whilst they were still on store shelves since they were rarely purchased leading to high losses due to product disposals after expiry and massive sales revenue collapse for various business facilities.

Taking a close look at one community that falls under the geographical scope of the Mashonaland Province in Zimbabwe. As for covid-19, there isn't much to talk about it because no one contracted the coronavirus in the small community under review. Although, it can't be entirely ignored because it's there in some regions of the country. The business has been low. Tobacco selling season was not as effective as it used to be. Nevertheless, farmers managed to attain a bit of profit from crop sales and bought inputs for the next season. Most villages were forced by the situation to live on the hand to mouth basis. They grow a lot of crops and vegetables to sell in the market but of late, because of Covid-19, you would find that markets were all closed up and there was no business.

They then had to engage an alternative subsistence farming business where they would grow crops and sell them to their neighbors which was however not a very profitable business exercise since their neighbors could take the crop produce on credit and then eventually, payback later whenever they finally have money to settle the credit sales. This was one of the effects of the Covid-19 lockdown. Other things that also came into effect as a result of the Covid-19 lockdown, related to immense desperation as people were now resorting to any initiatives that can generate income in an effort to put food of their families' dining tables. Mining activities and gold panning in the Mazowe area greatly increased as most of the working class citizens that lost their jobs during the Covid-19 period got engaged in these illegal gold panning activities all in an effort to get money and survive during the worldwide pandemic. All these outcomes were a result of the coronavirus pandemic.

An increase in poaching was noted in the Hwange National Park located in the Dete community. Considering a broader scale, an increase in poaching was noted as well countrywide in the numerous National Parks as well as protected areas due to total lockdown. Poachers took advantage of the national lockdown and invaded some of the precious protected species in these areas. Illegal gold panning increased in all areas (countrywide)

and in rivers that had grains of the wanted minerals leading to high soil erosion and land degradations. Many Chinese mines and activities were opened around the country which seemed not to be paying back reasonably (profitable) to local inhabitants. They never rehabilitate the land after harvesting the minerals and move on to other areas to inflict the same pain and activity.



Well, also looking on the brighter side of life, some business people took advantage of the covid-19 lockdown situation and used it to their own advantage for making a lot of money at this catastrophic point in time. These business people in some 'remote' areas would not abide with the set covid-19 regulations as they would keep their sole trader grocery shops open for extra-unauthorized hours all in an effort to 'maximize' their profits from potentially increased sales volumes and revenue. Some business people also went a step further in the exploitation of customers by implementing inflated and over-exaggerated prices on their commodities in remote villages where food supply was limited - also in an effort to make a lot of money out of this covid-19 lockdown situation.

Family ties became stronger than before as there was more time to bond as everyone stayed at home during the national lockdown. The old aged and disabled were supported by the provision of food and other valuable commodities that they couldn't access easily. Covid-19 situation stimulated the illiterate to learn how to conduct online activities. Better hygiene practices were encouraged, implemented, and maintained in an attempt to prevent contracting the coronavirus. Procreation as couples had more time for bonding. Positive family time was made available and utilized. Food aid to the under privileged families was available.

The Painted Dog Conservation is a non-profit making organization that is very vibrant in Zimbabwe as it has for numerous years, been a very vital aid to all the surrounding villages, schools, clinics, and communities in the Hwange District of the Matabeleland North Province. The Painted Dog Conservation was also not an exception in the list of non-profit making organizations that made instrumental and pivotal donations towards communities with regards to various personal protective equipment (PPE) for covid-19 that has been very useful in helping in the curbing of the deadly coronavirus in the

on-going fight for human survival. The Painted Dog Conservation donated infrared thermometers to approximately thirty schools in the Hwange District. The Painted Conservation donated personal protective equipment (PPE) for covid-19 testings to primary and secondary schools in the Hwange District. The Painted Dog Conservation also donated personal protective equipment (PPE) to the St. Patricks Hospital's doctors and nurses in Hwange as well as to most clinics in the Hwange District all in an effort to help extinguish the spread of the covid-19 virus.

In Zimbabwe as a whole, a couple of 'positive' coronavirus cases were recorded by our Ministry of Health's department and fortunately, death cases associated with them were very minimal or low hence we are forever grateful to the Almighty since the deadly virus did not 'claim' a large number of people's lives in our beloved country.

**Additional Article Credit To**

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*Many thanks Alpha-Arnold for your informative article and being part of our team!*

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*Thank you for your continued support.*



**Wishing you and your family joy and good health this holiday season.**

