

## **Research Update: September 2006**

### **Ruth Payne**

The time has come for me to give another update from my research on child-headed households in Zambia. There have been many developments since I last wrote in January, particularly in terms of building partnerships with Zambian organizations to ensure the research remains rooted in the needs of the people and communities in which it is based and of those trying to assist them. During the second of two six month periods of fieldwork in Zambia, I have encountered some interesting changes and developments. One of the key purposes of this research has been to trace a core group of CHHs to investigate the ways in which they evolve with a view to understanding, more comprehensively, their changing vulnerabilities through time. Preliminary findings from this period of fieldwork reveal some interesting changes amongst household members and within research communities. Such findings suggest this research will challenge the ways we currently understand and assist CHHs.

In addition to the changes observed within the research topic, there have also been significant developments in the research methodology. Crucially, this period of fieldwork has seen the research move from working largely at the household level with the assistance of four grassroots research gatekeepers, to working at a number of levels spanning grassroots, national and international levels. Whilst the CHHs themselves remain the focus of the research, it is necessary to involve a range of stakeholders to ensure the triangulation of data; to ensure that the research agenda remains deeply connected to needs of all parties; and to build relationships to ensure that on-going and end feedback of research findings and processes can be channeled through wide-ranging stakeholders.

Consequently, this year, I have consolidated relationships with four initial grassroots 'gatekeeper' organizations, bringing them on-board as 'research partners' and established other linkages with national and international organizations working in the field. Furthermore, returning to community leaders who assisted in last year's fieldwork in each of the research communities, I have been able to form core community groups (CCGs) in each research site, comprised of community members and leaders who are interested in contributing to and benefiting from the research project, through the sharing of information, ideas and findings. Further details about the research partnerships can be found in the links below.

Despite its growing links with research partners, the research remains firmly rooted in the realities of the daily lives of those living in CHHs. During this fieldwork visit, I have spent most of my time with the 12 core CHHs and in the communities in which they are situated. In spending considerable time with these households, I have been able to develop a detailed picture of their complex struggles and interactions. Data collected from the on-going dialogue with community leaders and grassroots organizations has added to the

pictures of these realities on the ground. It is these realities which I wish to bring forward in my thesis and through feedback programmes.