



Interview with Jessica Chenga

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Interview with Jessica Chenga

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Interviewee: Jessica Chenga

Place: Unit N, Seke Chitungwiza

Date: November 9, 2003

Can you start off by telling me your name?

I am Jessica Chenga.

Where were you born?

At Odzi in Mutare.

What kind of economic activities did you do when you were growing up?

We were selling food at the musika.

At Odzi?

No. In Mutare. We lived in Dangamvura. I was with my brother and his wife.

Oh so you were staying with your brother?

Yes. I was not yet married. And then I got married.

Where were you married?

Right in Mutare. Then I came to Harare with my husband's older brother.

Where was your husband at that time?

He was working in Gokwe. But I was living with my sister-in-law, wife to my husband's brother. So we arrived in Harare and I went straight to Chirambahuyo. I helped my sister-in-law to plaster her house. Then later on they were moved from Chirambahuyo and we started living here in Seke Unit N. When they were moved to Unit N we came together. So we are still waiting and hoping that one day we will get a house. Unfortunately we never did.

Did she get a house?

Yes she did. She passed away last year.

How come you did not get a house?

You know how things are when men are involved. My husband was now working in Chegutu while we were staying at Chirambahuyo. When my sister-in-law got a house she left me in her old house at Chirambahuyo and I was with my two children and a third one on the way. I was pregnant. So my sister-in-law left me in her squatter shelter at the Chirambahuyo squatter camp. Then my husband came and he said that we should go to Chegutu (a small town on the Harare-Bulawayo road) together so that we could stay with him there. He said that if I refused to go with

him then he was not going to give me money for food. I tried to explain to him that when a landlord (at Chirambahuyo) was given a house he or she left lodgers on the stand and then they were given stand numbers so that when some more houses were built they could move into those houses. So that was why I wanted to remain behind so that one day we could have a house of our own. He refused to leave me behind. But I was adamant and kept on staying and for sure he did not give me money for food. You know how men can be! I continued to stay with my children for some time. I was also staying with my sister-in-law's children who were selling cigarettes at the Chikwanha shopping center. All I wanted was to get a house. But after a little while I discovered that my husband was thinking that I was refusing to leave because I had a boyfriend there at Chikwanha. I tried again to explain and convince him that he did not have a reason to worry. Look here father of Evelyn (Evelyn is her daughter), it's not just me who is remaining behind. You see that house next door, the owner left but he left his lodger there in the one room that you see standing there. We argued over the issue but my husband insisted that he was not going to give me money for food. When my sister-in-law's sons were leaving they suggested that may be I should join my husband otherwise I was going to go hungry. I did not listen I continued staying there. Then my husband came back again and asked me whether I was still refusing to go with him and I said yes. But a little later I decided to join because the issue was affecting our marriage. But more important I was pregnant and I really needed some support money. That was how our dream of ever owning a house was shattered. Then when I came from Chirambahuyo I went to live with my sister-in-law in Unit N, some blocks down there. I eventually left them and started renting a room on my own.

Why did you leave?

You know two families in the same house is not a very comfortable living arrangement. Relations can go sour. My sister-in-law was the one who suggested that I should move out and look for my own place and I did exactly that.

Did you pay rent while you were living with your sister-in-law?

I used to pay the rent for the whole house. Whenever my husband send us some money I used part of it to pay the rent for the house and then the rest I used to buy food.

So what happened that made her ask you to move out?

I don't know. But when I began to notice that relations were no longer as cordial I decided to move out when she asked me to. The moment she asked me to look for a place of my own I did not argue, I did exactly that. I simply told myself that I could not insist on staying when the house was not mine. (Chisi chako masimba mashoma – you do not have power over something that is not yours.) That was when I started lodging and that is what I am doing to this day.

Where is your husband?

He is (working) in Borrowdale.

Does he come back home every day?

No. He stays there in Borrowdale. He is working kumayard (in the suburbs).

Why don't you go and live with him there?

Because the murungu does not want to see me there. He is a mean murungu. But the other one he worked for just before this one was very nice. I could go there and stay. But his current employer does not want to see women there so I have never been there. My husband however, tried to reason with him. He argued that I had to go and see where he works in case he fell ill then I would know where to go. So far we were thinking in case he gets sick he has to call my sister-in-law's son who works at Net One and tell him so that he brings the message here. So that is how we came to Chitungwiza.

How many were you in your family?

There were three of us.

Just three?

Yes. Two boys and one girl – me.

Okay three!

My mother passed away soon after giving birth to me. So we were looked after by my father. Then in 1974 my father passed away.

Your father never remarried?

He did. And they had five children together. One son is in Bulawayo and he is a policeman. One girl is married and lives in Honde and one girl passed away.

Was your father working in the city?

No. He was working on an estate in the Eastern Highlands. It was at the Stapleford Estate in Mutare. It was an estate that made planks from gum trees. Then he moved with his murungu and went to work in Mt Selinda. He then left his murungu because he was sick and he eventually died in Penhalonga at my brother's house. My brother was his first son.

Where did you go to school?

I was at St Augustine (a very good Anglican school in Mutare).

So you were at boarding school?

Yes.

So what did you do when you were done with school?

So I stopped because my father was sick at that time. When he went to Chimanimani he had been seriously sick for some time and then he later passed away. When he passed away I was being looked after by my brother and my sister-in-law. I stayed with them until I got married. I was actually living with them when I met the man who eventually married me.

Where is your husband from?

He comes from Mozambique.

Did he come to Zimbabwe alone?

No. He came with his older brother, just the two of them.

Did they come to Zimbabwe when they were young boys?

No. They were a little older.

Where did they go to work?

In Mutare. They were working for the same company that my brother was working for.

So you met your husband at your brother's work?

Yes. And they also lived in Dangamvura where we were also living. Their houses were close to the Municipality offices. So we met and eventually got married and we have six children together.

Have you ever been to Mozambique?

No.

Did he ever go back to Mozambique?

No. Both his parents passed away so he doesn't have anyone to visit.

How about his other siblings who had remained in Mozambique?

They have no sister in their family. They were only 4 boys. The oldest brother, the one was the first-born child passed away back in Mozambique during the Mozambican war. When that happened the three of them came here and stayed in this country. One of the brothers is the one whose wife I stayed with and then the third brother lives in Mt Pleasant.

Does he work kumayard?

Yes. He also has a rural home in Mhondoro.

Do you have a rural home too?

Not yet. But we looked for a home in Rusape in the resettlement areas.

Did you get it?

Yes and we are preparing to go and live there next year.

Did you ever look for a job after you did Standard 6?

No I did not because I was an orphan. you know when you grow up as an orphan life is not very easy. And living with your sister-in-law is not the easiest of options. But I did not have a choice. So I stayed with them until I got married and had my six children. I am still together with my husband.

How did you end up at Chirambahuyo? Or may be you should start off by telling me where you were when the war started?

I was in Mutare urban. Initially we were living at Alexander Dam where my husband was working.

Where is that?

At Odzani Dam in the Mutasa area. My husband was one of the workers who were digging the pipeline that supplies Mutare with water.

When was that?

1978.

Did he continue working there during the war?

Yes. Then they were transferred to Gokwe. It was still during the war.

What kind of job was he doing in Gokwe?

They were making bridges. They were carried to that place by plane from the airport. But when the war became too serious he was transferred and he started working here in town.

Where?

In the Msasa area.

Doing what?

He was working on the company premises. From there he was sent to Rusape at Mutungagore where he was also constructing bridges. Then that Company closed and he was employed by another Company called Nicholson where they had to go and work in Nyamaropa.

Was that still during the war?

No. That was after independence. But when we came to Chirambahuyo it was still during the war. That was in 1978. I was nursing my second child. The war was hot in '78. So I came to Chirambahuyo and stayed with my sister-in-law.

But you had been living in the Mutare city, how come you had to flee to Chirambahuyo?

Yes. And my husband was working out of town. As a married woman I decided to come and live at Chirambahuyo with my husband's older brother's wife. Because my husband was working out of town, their houses were built outside town. All houses for people who were constructing bridges were built outside Mutare. It was not very safe there. That is why I had to run away. I was coming to join my sister-in-law who got a stand at Chirambahuyo.

How did she get the stand?

She had gone to her aunt who told her about the stands at Chirambahuyo. She immediately went there and got one. But by the time I came the stands were already parceled out so I did not get one.

What did the people have to do to get the stands?

You just had to stand in line and have your name registered and eventually you got a stand. When the people arrived there they were told to build thatched houses.

Why thatched houses?

I don't know, probably because brick under asbestos suggested some permanency that the City Council did not want to convey. And when they were building the walls they used those thin manhuwenhuwe (a short shrub) sticks.

Where did you get manhuwenhuwe?

We just looked them right there in the Chirambahuyo area.

But isn't it that they are very short and thin?

They are but some when left alone can grow a little taller. It can be as tall as this door but still thin.

Wouldn't the wall be crooked though?

No. Surprisingly they can make a very good wall. Using our own hands we then plastered the inside and the outside of the house and then went to cut grass for thatching. We got the dagga from anthills. Anthills make very compact and smooth plaster. We went to get the grass at Kerefu. That is a farm that is across the Hunyani River and close to the international airport.

Was that allowed?

No. We were stealing. We had to go there early in the morning. I went there with my sister-in-law. The farm is adjacent to that place where women sell thatching grass. So we brought the grass back to Chirambahuyo carrying it on our heads. We put it in the house and then we hired someone to come and thatch the house. Once the person had finished thatching we then paid him.

How did they climb on to the roof for purposes of thatching since the walls were not so strong?

They were strong. It was a house that people could actually live in. We built two rooms initially. Some people were building nice house with asbestos roofing and bricks.

I thought they were not supposed to build permanent structures at Chirambahuyo?

They were not supposed to but people did it all the same.

Were did they get the bricks?

They moulded the bricks with dagga from the anthills. That is very strong dagga and it makes strong bricks. That is what I found people in Chirambahuyo doing.

How many the people lived at Chirambahuyo?

There were way too many people. Too many. The houses were so close. When a child is knew at Chirambahuyo and he went outside the house to play he wouldn't know how to get back because of too many houses that were closely packed and in a disorderly manner. A house would be here and another one would be like at that mango tree (less than 2 metres). They were so close together. If there was going to be a fire outbreak in that settlement all the houses were going to burn.

Did any of the houses burn?

Some did. People were really careful with fire because they knew that it could be a disaster. Many of the people had asbestos roof by the end of the war. But those which were thatched were still in the majority and they were short houses, juts like those you see on the commercial farm compounds. They were closely packed. You had to watch over your children because you could easily lose them. You had to take them to the toilet to avoid having to look for them.

What kind of toilets did you have at Chirambahuyo?

They were public toilets. You had to be a person who doesn't easily feel nauseatic to get in there. People stayed there simply because they wanted houses. When you want something you do anything.

How did people know that if you stayed at Chirambahuyo you will eventually get a house?

These people started off at Derbyshire Quarry. From there they were moved to Chirambahuyo where they were given some stands.

Why were they removed from Derbyshire?

They were told that it was not a residential place and so they were brought to Zengeza 4 when it was still called Chirambahuyo.

Why was it called that?

I have no idea. It was probably because there wee too many people. But I think it also referred to women who were refusing to stay in the rural areas and participate in rural socio-economic activities like refusing to do tasks such as using a stone grinder. I remember asking my sister-in-law how the name Chirambahuyo started and she simply told me that was the name of the place. But it was also called Zengeza 4. Zengeza 5 was the Red Cross. The people who were in the Red Cross (settlement) were the ones whose area was called Zengeza 5.

Which ones were the Red Cross houses?

(Seke) Unit H.

Oh, Unit H was the Red cross area?

Yes.

Why was it called that?

I don't know why but it was called the Red Cross (it was because the people who lived in the "Red Cross" houses were assisted, materially, by the Red Cross. So that was the situation until my sister-in-law's house and others who were given their houses and they left Chirambahuyo.

What did they use for cooking?

They crossed the Hunyani River to Kerefu Farm and stole some firewood from there. You know the same farm that I said we went to get thatch grass from. That was where we went to cut firewood. We used some of the firewood for cooking while the rest was sold. You could see people with heaps of firewood that they were selling.

Did you ever get caught by the farm owner?

People had to wake up early in the morning. Some of the people who were afraid of getting caught used to buy the firewood because it was still cheap – going for 5c or 10c. It was because people were afraid of getting caught that they bought some firewood. Otherwise we were bitter that we had to buy firewood when dead trees were rotting on farms. They should have had a heart and allowed poor people to get the firewood. Otherwise most people simply went to steal from the farm. Sometimes we asked some of the women at Chirambahuyo to bring us big bundles of firewood and then we paid them.

Was the farm ever guarded?

There were guards eventually and some of the people were caught. Some were caught and they were released but they were told to leave the firewood at the far.

What happened to those who were caught?

The guards told them to put down the firewood and leave the farm, without it.

Were the squatters cutting down trees?

No. We were just gathering dead wood.

Who were in the majority at Chirambahuyo men or women?

The majority were women.

Do you have any idea why women in the majority?

Well, the majority of the people at Chirambahuyo came from Mtoko where they had ran away from the war. When the war started many people from Mtoko fled and came to live here (in Harare and Chitungwiza). Even if you were going door to door in this location (where the former squatters were relocated after independence) you will find that the majority are people from Mtoko and then there are also some people from Mrewa. Yes they are in the majority. There are some who went to Mbare and stayed there. Then they heard that there were some squatters at Derbyshire and they went to join them there. But they could not live in peace as they were constantly chased by policemen on horseback. We heard the policemen used to go there and tell people to leave but they refused. They would pull down the people's houses but the squatters rebuild as soon as the police left. The government then decided to settle them at Chirambahuyo. From Chirambahuyo the

squatters were resettled in permanent houses in the Seke Location Units N, O, P. But some of the houses were built by Muzorewa during the time he was the leader (1978-79). All the people you see in Seke Units M, N, O, and P came from Chirambahuyo. There are very few people who live here who did not originally come from Chirambahuyo. Those few who did not are here because they bought the houses from the original occupiers who were former squatters. When they were first built the houses were just two-roomed houses. Unit N was the first one to be built. Everyone of the people who lived at Chirambahuyo was given a number. When a house with a corresponding number was built, the supervisor came to notify you and so you had to move to the location. This is why so many people in these units are poor. Because we are all poor people from Chirambahuyo. The few houses you see that are extended it's either because they were sold to better off people or they are owned with parents whose children are now working in London or who do cross border shopping to South Africa. The rest of us are struggling to survive.

Did they carry your belongings to Unit N?

No. You had to do that on your own and to make matters worse there were no buses that went as far the new stands in these units. Because they were just building houses in the area there were no roads as yet. The only road that was there was the one from Makoni Shopping Centre to Unit K. all these other areas were bushes. They started making roads when people had already settled here. Some of the builders were already building on the other side. There were many builders in the area building several houses at the same time. They had to be very fast because people were waiting for the accommodation. And the fact that the houses were made form concrete slabs also made it pretty fast for them to build a house.

Was it called Unit N right from the beginning?

Yes. Then there was Unit M and many others.

Which company got the contract to build the houses?

CISK. So what the superintendent did was that when the builders had finished building your house he came to tell you and so you had to leave Chirambahuyo and occupy your house. He immediately destroyed the house that you had been living in at Chirambahuyo so that no-one else would occupy it. Then the people told the superintendent that they had lodgers whom they were staying with. They asked you how many lodgers you had. They allowed you to leave 2 people only.

What happened to the rest of the people?

That was their own problem.

Did they have to continue paying rent to the landlord who would have left for Unit N?

No. They now had to pay to the Town Council in Zengeza. The house would now belong to the lodger.

Didn't the former landlords come back and ask for rent?

No they could not because by then the houses was registered in the lodger's name and also because the former landlord had been given his own house already. So the lodger was given

a house card which meant that the stand now belonged to him. They also wrote down the identity card number of your husband and yours. In fact many of the lodgers who remained at Chirambahuyo eventually got their own houses. Some are here while others are in Unit M and P. There was no lodger who could not get a house. Well, except or some men like my husband who did not allow their wives to remain behind.

Could you get the house if you were just a woman on her own?

Some women had to say that they were widows and so that was how they got their houses. Many of the houses in this area were given to 'widows.' Some of them were the women who ran away from Mtoko after their husbands had been killed. The majority of those people are living in this area ran away from the Mtoko area. At independence there some lorries that were brought here and transport was offered to those who wanted to go back to their rural homes. People were told that the war is now over and those who wanted to go back could do that. Transport was provided. Some people went back but some did not. Many people thought it was important to keep the urban houses just in case another war broke out.

When did people move to this area?

In 1980 because that when I gave birth to my son. I went to the maternity clinic for free and that was after independence. I was already living here with my sister-in-law. In '79 people were still in Chirambahuyo.

So people were still at Chirambahuyo when the war ended?

Yes. They were then moved here after independence. Muzorewa was the one who had these houses built.

Where there any people who fled from the war and went to stay at Mbare and then they again moved from Mbare to Chirambahuyo?

There were not. Squatters in Harare stayed there. They never came here. But in '83 we heard that there were stands that were being given to people at Irvines Farm. I also went there because I also wanted to have a house of my own. You know Irvines, that farm where they sell eggs. So I went there and we started clearing our stands. Some people actually built asbestos houses and there were tuckshops too. Then one morning an aeroplane flew past and dropped some fliers which said that people were not supposed to build and that everybody was supposed to vacate that place by midday. We had not gone to that farm on that day we were sitting at home. I told my sister-in-law to listen to what was being said on news. It was said that people (who had settled on that farm) were being chased away. That was sad because there were tuckshops already. People were already selling beer. We used to take combis (minibus) to get there and then during the evening we used to go back home the same way. We just went there to spend the day and when it was getting dark we left. I was with my son, the one who is doing "A" Level (Form 6). We went there the following day and we found out that soldiers had destroyed all the houses. They had pulled them down. All of them.

That was done by the army?

Yes. Initially the then Minister Chikowore had passed by in a plane and he is the one who dropped the fliers. We were there when the fliers were dropped. And we said that under the circumstances

we were not coming back the following day. The whole place was pulled down. One day we went to order some eggs (from Irvines) and we looked at the place as we passed by. It was true the place had been pulled down. We had thought that we were going to get some stands there but it did not work out.

Did you ever see the squatters at Mbare Musika during the war?

No.

You never went to order some vegetables for sale there?

I used to go there but I never really went to the squatter's camp. We used to hear that the squatters were over there but we never went there. We saw zvimatumba (shacks) from a distance. And we were told that they were squatters who were running away from the war. Of course there were some people who simply decided to join those people at Mbare Musika. Some of the people who fled from the war live here in Unit N. A certain woman who lived over there came from Mtoko. I used to be her lodger. I was also a lodger while I was at Chirambahuyo. My sister-in-law found a house to rent for me and I went to live there. So I was renting a room from that woman. I only left her when maiguru said that my house was out and that I should therefore go and stay in her house so that I could also await my turn to get a house. That was when I left that woman's house.

Are there any other Matoko people you know who were squatters at Mbare Musika?

There is also mother of Gina who lives down there. There is also mother of Barbara she comes from Mtoko as well. Then there is mai Doka she lives a block away, behind this house. There is also another woman who stays some blocks down there, she also ran away from the war.

Can you tell me how life was in Chirambahuyo?

You had to be strong to stay in Chirambahuyo. The place was so dirty. If you see any woman going crazy because some lodgers are not cleaning her house, let her be. Chirambahuyo was full of faeces. Take me for example, I could not even go to the bathroom because I had a problem. If ever I saw anything like that I would not be able to eat. So right from the first day when I failed to go into the bathroom, we never used it. So from that day I used to take my children into the Mayambara village and we would relieve ourselves there in the bush or sometimes we asked the people in th Mayambara village if we could use their toilets.

But didn't the bush end up messed up just like the toilets?

No. Not too many people used that bush. When I first arrived in Chirambahuyo I found a lot of children with gwembe (measles). People used to get their water from the water taps that were around a concrete slub. The taps were along the edges of the slub. They had put a slub so that the place did not get to be muddy because of the water. Chirambahuyo was dirty. People were saved by the God. Otherwise they were supposed to die like they are doing right now (referring to people dying from HIV/AIDS). The moment you got outside you saw faeces everywhere. If you went behind your house there were faeces, it was the same if you went to the water taps. You had to be in your shoes all the time. I told my sister-in-law that I did not want to go to the bush until after eating. Even then I would walk for some distance along the road and then look for a better place where my children could relieve themselves. So many children had the gwembe. If you

were the kind of person that felt sick easily you would never drink the water from the taps because you found those children with gwembe being washed right at the tape and they were crying from the pain. So what did was wake up early in the morning at around 4 am got some water from the communal tap and carried it home. Then I went back again to get some more water. I would also get some water to use in the evening at that time. My sister-in-law did not understand why I had to go to the water taps so early in the morning. I just told her that I did not want to go to the water taps during the day because of the dirty that was around the water taps. She went there and she came back saying that she had seen so many children with gwembe. She commented that our children were really lucky because they did not have the gwembe. I told her it was because they had a type of blood that did not easily catch communicable diseases. When you went to the water taps during the day you would find mothers busy washing their children. Their skin was peeling off in affected areas and all that peeled skin was left on the slab where we were supposed to get our water. I could not touch that tape. I could not believe that I was living that kind of life. The disease was easily transmitted because there were so many people at Chirambahuyo. You know how populated Hatcliff extension (another squatter-camp like location close to Borrowdale) is? That was how Chirambahuyo looked like. I asked my sister-in-law why the people were not being moved to other areas so as to decrease the population from that location. She told me that it was impossible because most of the people were running away from the war. I asked her where they came from and she said they were largely from Mtoko. That is for sure because even this location (Unit N) is full of Matoko people. If you see anyone who says that he never lived at Chirambahuyo then you should know that they bought a stand from other people. Some of the people sold their stands while they were still in Chirambahuyo because they wanted to go back home.

So they were selling stands that they never bought?

Yes. And they went together to the superintendent and had the ownership changed. People had to go and pay the rent at Gazaland.

Gazaland in Highfield?

No, in Zengeza.

Where in Zengeza 2?

Zengeza 2. So I had to go to the water taps early in the morning. Even then I did not put my water bucket on the concrete floor. I put it on my knee and then turned on the water tap until my bucket was full. First of all I washed the water tap and made sure that it was clean. But even then, I was not satisfied about the cleanliness of the water. Every time I was drinking the water I would remember where the tap was. People were not hygienic at Chirambahuyo. You could see a child touching the water tap while he was being washed. Had there been an outbreak of diarrhea in that location, many children would have died because there were too many people in a small space. Or if cholera had attacked the location, many would have died. But God is good and he looked after his people and they survived. I could not believe that it was the same location later on because the gwembe eventually came to an end.

The gwembe stopped while you were still in Chirambahuyo?

Yes.

So was the gwembe just at Chirambahuyo or it was also there in other places of the country?

It was also there in the countryside. But it was much better because the homes are far from each other. But it was different at Chirambahuyo because the houses are so close together. I had to buy Dettol (antiseptic) and bath my children with it everyday. That way even if they had gwembe it wouldn't have been as severe as the other children. Our children had the measles once when we were still in Mutare. Even then, my own children never suffered from those. It was just my sister-in-law's oldest son, the one she came with here. He had the measles just for one week. And those measles were not the gwembe type. It was a different kind of measles. The measles dried after a few baths. But in Chirambahuyo it was worsened by the dirty. You would never want to leave the house after a rain storm. You wouldn't know where to put your feet.

Were there no cleaners who were responsible for toilets?

They were there. But the toilets got dirty the moment they left. If you wanted to use a clean toilet you had to go there and wait by the door while they cleaned. A few minutes after that the toilets were dirty again. Sometimes they blocked. One flush was supposed to flush everything away. All the toilets were flushed at one time.

What did the toilets look like?

It was just a sort of small canal, they were not the toilets like the ones you know. They were no partitions. It was just a cement flow. When they flushed everything was carried by the water. That was not a good place. Things were not well at Chirambahuyo. If the white people took pictures of that place you will see them. If ever you ask any former Chirambahuyo resident what it was like there they will tell you that it was tough. This is why you find many women fighting men when the men sell houses without consent from their wives. It was hard. We were suffering.

Where did you go to bath?

Right there in the toilets. There were showers. But you could never go there. Because there were faeces even in the showers. Most people ended up buying those big portables tubs that you could use right inside the house. You know those metal big tubs? Yes those. That way you did not have to go to the bathroom. After bathing you just went outside and threw away the water. I never went into that bathroom to shower. I went there just once when I first arrived and after that never went back.

Who cleaned the toilets?

They were cleaned by the Chitungwiza Town Council workers. By then Chirambahuyo was called Zengeza 4, Chirambahuyo (Zengeza 1, 2, and 3 already existed.)

Who named it Zengeza 4?

I think it was the City Council. Zengeza 4 was eventually built after independence and it stretches from Chitungwiza General Hospital right up to Chikwanha. When they were digging the trenches for the house foundations they dug a lot of bones of human beings (the area had been a village before the people were moved away by the government to make room for township). We saw several ambulances rushing to the site and we simply thought may be one of the construction workers had been injured when in actual the ambulance was going to get skeletons that were

unearthed during construction. A location was being built in an area that was scattered with graves. The area had been home to the Seke people right up to Unit N, O and L. That is why the township is called Seke.

What happened to those villagers?

They were removed and they were pushed out of the perimeter of the town. There were a few who were left behind and were incorporated into the urban area. There is one at Unit J, if you know a house under black tiles that is there, that's one of them. He said he was not going to leave because he had built a beautiful house. There were two more people from the Seke Reserve who remained behind in Zengeza 4. I don't know of anyone who remained behind here in Unit N. I think they were all removed. Those who were incorporated into the township had nice well built houses. If you look carefully you can actually see wells. We grow our crops on the outskirts of this location and it's all graves out there. Close to my sister-in-law's house there are graves right by the roadside.

What did the CISK contractors do with the bones that they dug out of graves?

Those who dug out graves in Zengeza 4 looked for relatives of those dead people so that they would rebury them. The government could not just do it on its own without the presence of the relatives. You know how it is with our customs.

Did they find the relatives?

Yes they did. Some of the original inhabitants who had been moved out of Chitungwiza knew where they had buried their dead and they came. Then when they finished building Zengeza location they also built Zengeza 4 Hospital (Chitungwiza General Hospital). They then opened it and people started going to that hospital. That's that about how this location came into being. It is settled by poor people who were running away from the war. If you come some time during the day I will take you around and show you some of the people who were at Zengeza 4 Chirambahuyo. There is another older woman who lives behind these houses.

Where does she come from?

Mtoko.

What did people eat?

Some were vendors. As you know whenever there is a location people will always have something to do.

Where did people get money to start off their vending?

I don't know where they got it. I wonder. You would find people selling cooking oil here and eggs there. Many of the vendors sold eggs. People used to go to Irvines and order eggs which they then sold. They ate the eggs at breakfast. Lobels (a truck that delivered bread from Lobels Bakery) used to get into Chirambahuyo. They used to bring hot bread. People used to eat in Chirambahuyo. Lobels was still cooking bread that had breasts on the top side of the loaf. Sometimes a motorbike from Lobels delivered the bread. Early in the morning you would find the Lobels truck arriving and once the bread was sold out another truck came. People were buying

bread. (Compared to the present day Zimbabwe where many people can hardly afford to buy bread.) When I first came to Chirambahuyo I didn't know that anyone could eat chicken intestines. But when I arrived at Chirambahuyo in '79, I arrived at Chirambahuyo after in the evening and I started looking for house Number 7.

Who gave numbers to the houses?

The superintendent. He used to write the number of the house with charcoal, sometimes they used paint. So I walked along one of the dust roads in the squatter camp. Someone asked me what number I was looking for and I said 2351 and that person told me to continue following that road which I did. I did not even know that when I passed by a certain market I was passing by my sister-in-law, my brother wife.

Where did she come from?

She had been living in Derbyshire. Right now she has a house in Unit O and she is a vendor at Makoni shopping center. Her husband was working at a Tobacco Company. They had been living in St Mary's but when they were told that people were settling at Derbyshire with the hope of getting their own houses they also joined them.

Did they have their own house in St Mary's?

No. They were renting. So they went to Derbyshire.

Where did people get the idea that if they became squatters they would end up having houses? Had there been other squatters who had been given houses before?

No. But they said that if you want to shoot us go ahead. The government used to sent the police to pull down the squatters' houses but the people never left. When the houses were pulled down, the people slept on the ground until they had built new squatter shelters. After a while the government got tired of pulling down the shacks and left the people there. I heard that they stayed at Derbyshire for a long time until they were moved to Chirambahuyo. They had demarcated the stands at Chirambahuyo already. Some of them who managed Chirambahuyo also got stands for their children especially those who had children who were a little older. So those sons also got houses here. In '79 they began building houses. They started off with Unit N and then the other units followed. When they finished building the houses people came to settle. But when they moved into the houses they were incomplete as they did not have cement floors. They were earth floors. They also had very poor quality doors. You had to quickly put a better door. If you left you could find it gone with the tsotsis. They just unhooked them and took them. They built very cheap houses, the cheapest in Chitungwiza. They started off by paying a rent of \$14 and then it was hiked to \$23, then \$40, \$42, \$50, \$100 and it went on going up like that. Right now the rent has gone up so much so that many people cannot afford it. It's about \$1095. That excludes water. Can you believe that! All these poor people being asked to pay such high rents! The good thing is that the houses do not belong to the City Council anymore as they were converted to the home ownership scheme where those who can afford it can pay the City Council and the house then becomes theirs. If the people want to sell they can do that. Once it's ownership you are supposed to pay for the services only – electricity, water and trash collection. Long ago the former squatters were told that they would have finished paying the full cost of the houses in 20 years time. But

20 years has long since passed. But the City Council is still asking people to pay. That is the problem.

Okay you were talking about the first time you arrived at Chiramahuyo in '79 and you did not know that your brother's wife was also staying there.

Yes. I think I stayed for a whole month and then I went back to Mutare to visit my other brother.

Was it possible to travel given the war situation?

You could travel. But when I went to Mutare that was when the petroleum tanks were bombed and they were burning. We used to see buses arriving in Mutare covered in soot. We wondered about the dark clouds that were coming from the direction of the city of Harare. But we were informed by a Mverechena (bus company) driver that SHELL petroleum tanks had been bombed. Before that we had heard that Harare had been destroyed. We heard that while we were at Odzani. So I got on the bus to go to my brother-in-law's to find out if his wife who was in Harare was okay. So I went ...

Were they in Harare?

My brother-in-law was working in Mutare. He stayed at St Joseph's. He was the one responsible for making sure that the equipment that was used to dig the ground during road construction was there.

Was he a guard?

Yes. He was a guard. So I asked him whether his wife was okay since we had heard that Harare was burning. He told me that was where he was. So we thought of what we should do and concluded that someone should go to Harare the following morning and check how things were. So I waited for a bus that was coming from Honde and which was supposed to proceed to Harare. My brother-in-law had received a phone call from his wife who told him that she was fine but she was not sure whether the fire would get as far as Chirambahuyo. The fire was still raging. His daughter Patricia was at school in Grade 7. So I volunteered that I could go and check out his wife. My husband gave me some money for bus fare and I left for Harare. I arrived at Chirambahuyo and found my sister-in-law. The fire was still lighting the sky to as far as Chirambahuyo.

How long did the fire burn?

For about a week or was it two weeks.

You could see the fire as far as Chikwanha?

Yes. The night sky was as bright as day. We used to spent the whole night sitting because we were afraid that the fire might get to us while we were sleeping. It was petrol burning. Some people actually ran away from Harare thinking that the war was now in the city. The fire then subsided and eventually died down. So I got on the bus and went back to Mutare. I told my brother-in-law that his wife was okay. He asked me whether there was any other area that had been destroyed in Harare and I said no. the fire had started and ended with the burning of fuel tanks in Harare. I also told him that we could see the light from the fire from Chitungwiza. When I

passed by my sister-in-law that was when I had just arrived from Mutare. But I did not quite know my sister-in-law. When they got married at Chigodora our country home I was not there. I used to wonder why they did not want to visit us so that I could see her. But they had moved to Harare. So one day I wanted to go and buy vegetables at the market and my sister-in-law gave me some money so that I can bring some more vegetables.

Did you cook together with your sister-in-law?

Yes. I was like a daughter-in-law to her.

Why?

Because she was the one who looked after my husband when he was young. When he left Mozambique it was her who looked after him. They had left their parents in Mozambique so they lived with their older brother and his wife. My husband and his other younger brother lived with their older brother until they had their own families and moved out. So she was like my mother-in-law. So I went to Chikwanha market and then I saw this man who was standing and he looked very familiar. I kept looking at him. He was familiar and then I was like, "oh, that is my brother Frank." I went to him and greeted him. He looked at me and he asked, "Where are you coming from Mary? Where are you living?" I answered that I was living a few houses up the road. Then he asked me when I had come to Chirambahuyo and I told him that I had been there for a whole month. He couldn't believe it. He went on asking, "Where are you staying and with whom? I told him that I was with my sister-in-law and then he got directions to our house. His wife who did not know me asked who I was and he told her that I was his sister, his uncle's daughter and that uncle was the one who had looked after him when he was young and he had bought him some clothes. So I asked him where they lived and they took me to their house. They also lived there (at Chirambahuyo) close to the Chikwanha market. They accompanied me to the vegetable market and then they showed me their house. After that we went together to our house. We bought the vegetables and we went to their house. My sister-in-law (cousin's wife) brewed some tea and we had tea. But I could not stay any longer because I still had the vegetables that were needed for dinner at home. My sister-in-law asked me whether I had seen where her market table was and I said yes. Then we went together with my brother to our house. My sister-in-law immediately remembered my brother because she had seen him at my father's funeral. So she asked where he was coming from. He said right here in Chirambahuyo and he had just bumped into me. Then she asked him whether he still remembered her and she said yes, he was the brother that came from Harare when our father passed away. So I told her that we had just bumped into each other. From that time onwards we used to visit each other. I was at their house for two days. The distance to their house was like from here to the shops (about 10 metres away). They were very close to Chikwanha. Their house is now in Unit O but my sister-in-law has a market at Makoni. That is how things were.

Was your brother working?

Yes he was working.

So he used to commute?

Yes. He was working at a tobacco company and he used to get the bus to the work place everyday.

Where there many men who were working at Chirambahuyo?

Yes. If you had been there you would have been surprised that such a well dressed man was coming out of such a house. If you were to go there over the weekend you would be amazed by the kind of radios that they played, very good ones. You would have been surprised by the good furniture they had. All that was seen the day they had to move to Seke, to the new houses. That was when we could tell that certain families had men who were working. Those who did not just tied their small bundle of belongings in a piece of cloth and moved to the new houses. The majority of the squatter were those who did not have a lot of property and they had fled away from the war. Those who were working simply went to stay at Chiranbahuyo so that they could have a house because they had heard that those people would eventually be given some houses. So they left the houses they were renting and went and settled in Chirambahuyo.

That does mean that housing as problem?

It was not easy to get houses.

Did you have electricity at Chirambahuyo?

No. Just tower lights. That was why there were so many tsotsis.

There were tsotsis?

There were lots of tsotsis at Chirambahuyo. I remember when I remained there when my sister-in-law had already left for the new houses, my door was opened when I was asleep. Fortunately I woke up. I was sleeping in that room together with my sister-in-law's sons. They were sleeping on the other side. So I told my nephews that there was someone who was pushing the door and they suggested that we just keep quiet. We used to put a huge pole across the door so that if anyone tried to enter we would hear them. So he pushed and we heard the door squeaking. Morgan then asked, "who are you?" and the man ran away. There were many tsotsis at Chirambahuyo. If you hanged your clothes out to dry you might find them gone. They would steal even wet clothes. Some people found their houses empty. Some of the people who lived at Chirambahuyo were tsotsis. There were also shebeens (houses that were "converted" into beer drinking places where people went to buy and drink beer. Patrons could get beer on loan.

There were shebeens at Chirambahuyo?

Yes. There were many shebeens.

Who ran them?

Many of the people who ran the shebeen were prostitutes. Those women who did not have husbands. They bought Chibuku (opaque beer) and then they sold it from their houses.

So there was a lot of prostitution going on?

A lot. Wherever many people are there will always be prostitution. They used to go to Chikwanha to drink and once the bar was closed they then went to shebeens. Some people were picked from the street in the morning dead.

What did they do with the bodies?

They were picked up and taken by the police.

Were they able to identify them?

I do not know. We would just hear that there was someone who was found dead on the streets.

Did you have an identity card by the time you were at Chirambahuyo?

Yes.

When did you first get your ID?

During the war in 1976.

I heard that long back they used to say that women do not need to get identity cards?

We got the identity cards during the war when it was very hot in Mutare. I was still nursing my oldest girl. They told us that any woman from Grade 7 (about 13 years) should have an identity card.

Do you mean birth certificate?

No. they wanted us to have national identity cards.

Why?

Because by then there was curfew in Mutare. The people in the locations were under curfew.

Why was there a curfew?

Do you know what our location, Dangamvura was like? It was like this location (Unit N). you see beyond those houses it's rural areas. So once you were out of Dangamvura you were immediately in Dora Estate and then into Bocha and Zimunya reserves. So when the comrades were in the Kuhudzai area of Dora estate and they started fighting you could actually see the bullets flying in the air. We could see them from the location. The soldiers used to come and knock at our doors at night. Our Compound used to be by the Ministry and the soldiers used to get to that area and knock on our doors.

You were living in a compound?

Yes. It was a compound for people who constructed the bridges. They worked for the Ministry of Transport. But it was right by the location, on the edges of the location. Just like there at the edge of Unit O. Even when we wanted to buy anything we had to go to the market in the location. So soldiers used to come because comrades were now coming and getting right into Dangamvura. Some of us who had experienced the war could tell they were comrades when we saw them in the location. We could tell that this was a real gandanga. So the days when comrades started getting into the country were the same days that we started seeing bullets above Greenside and the Christmas Pass. I do not know whether you heard about it. The varungu ran for their lives and slept at the Musika WeHuku in Dangamvura (a market in the African residential area). Bullets

were passing by and the varungu slept at the market. That was when the war started. They were firing from Mozambique.

When was that?

In 1976. the bullets were dropping right into Greenside. We knew right then that the war was upon us. When the varungu ran away that was when we were forced to get identity cards.

When was that?

That was in '76. Yes. That was when the war started in Mutare.

So how did you know that you were supposed to go and get identity cards?

They announced in the location. They said every child in Grade 7 and up should get an identity card. They also published the news in the newspaper. My brother had a child who was in Grade 7 and he had to get an ID. By Grade 7 children were 14 years.

What did you do with the identity cards?

We had to carry them on us all the time. But many women were not happy about it. So we were refusing to get the identity cards. Why did we have to? We were not men. Then they knocked our door and asked us whether we had identity cards. They knocked early in the morning at about 6am. They simply knocked the door open with their feet and the first thing they did was look around to see if there was anything suspicious or any other suspicious person. So they came in and asked for my identity cards. I told them that I did not have one. Then they asked whether the baby that I had was mine and I said yes. Then they asked my husband to show them his identity card. My husband's identity card had a red line across because he came from Mozambique. (All those from Mozambique whose identity cards had a line across were not supposed to work within 50 miles of any urban center. This was meant to direct labor to the farms and mines.) They also wanted to see his work identity card and he said that he did not know where it was but they insisted that they wanted to see it. The identity card he had was a Mozambican one and unfortunately he had left his Rhodesian work identity card at work. So when they came back in the evening he showed them the right identity card otherwise he would have been suspected of being a comrade. In the following morning, I think it was on a Wednesday I woke up early in the morning and the Dangamvura Hall was full of people some of whom were waiting outside. I woke up early in the morning as I wanted to cook my husband's breakfast. The soldiers who were by the Hall asked me what I was looking at and I told them that I wanted to get some firewood but I was afraid of the soldiers. They asked me where the firewood was and I told them by the house wall. They then asked me what I was afraid of and I said it's still dark. They asked me why I wanted to cook so early in the morning and I told them that I wanted to cook for my husband who wanted to go to work. They asked what my husband's work was and I told them that he worked for the Ministry of Construction. They then said I should go ahead and get the firewood. My husband opened the door and asked me whom I was talking with and I said that there was a soldier. Then he asked what was going on and I told him that I did not know. He was afraid and thought that they might burn us in the house. So I laughed and the soldier also laughed and he said, "for sure you will die in the house if you are harboring them." He then came over and asked for matches because he wanted to light a cigarette. By the time I was going back into the house, the compound was full of soldiers and they were asking everyone to show them an identity card.

Did you have one by then?

No. That was on a Friday. On Sunday I left my daughter at home and went to get my identity card. I went there and they asked me whether I was married and I said yes. So they asked my name and I told them I was Jessica Mumbwe. They wanted to know whose family name it was and I told them that it was my father's. They then said that if I was married they needed my husband's family name. I told them his name was Leonard Chenga. I then asked them why they would give me my husband's surname, what if he had not yet finished paying the lobola? They insisted that they wanted my husband's name. I argued that isn't it that when a man had not yet finished paying lobola I could not change my last name. They asked for my totem and I told them Bonga. Then they told me to go to the next person who was going to take my picture.

Why did they need your totem?

They asked for everything. They asked me my totem and I told them Bonga. They asked me whether I was married and I said yes and then how many children I had and I said one. They asked her name and I told them Evelyn. Then my husband's name and I told them Leonard. They asked for his name as if they wanted to write it down but they did not. Behind me was another woman called Emeria. I knew her because we went to school together. The first people who went to get identity cards were my sister-in-law and others. My sister-in-law was asked different questions. They wanted to know her father-in-law's name. The man who was her husband's father! She told them that she did not know. So she left without an identity card. So when I went and came back with my identity card she was surprised. So they asked different questions.

Did the identity cards have pictures?

Yes.

Was it paper?

It was metal one. They made metal ones so that no-one can ever The picture came out the same day. They took our picture in the morning at around 8 and they told us to wait until 2 in the afternoon. By then it was ready. We sat on the lawn waiting the pictures to be developed. At 2 they started calling our names and we collected our identity cards. Those who were not given had to come the following day.

Did they explain why you had to have an identity card?

They told us that we had to keep it on us all the time. They advised us to put it on a string and hang it on our necks. They were also written – Rhodesia.

Why did they ask you to have identity cards?

We were not very sure, but I think they were afraid that we would go and join the comrades. When my husband went to get his own identity card the following day they asked for his grandfather's name and that was the name they wrote on his identity card. He told them that his grandfather's name was Zuze, so that is the name on his identity card. For my sister-in-law it was also different. If they were to say that when someone dies it is only a person who bears the same name who can identify that person in the mortuary I would not be allowed to identify my sister-in-law. My husband would not. But his older brother who also had a name Tore. My sister-in-law who was also asked

for her husband's grandfather's name would have my husband identify her. It was all so confusing. They asked people different questions.

What kind of fuel did you use at Chikwanha?

Firewood.

Did you cook in or out of the house?

Outside. Initially we did not have a kitchen but by the time we built a kitchen we cooked inside the house. Our kitchen was well built so there was no danger that the roof of the kitchen would catch fire.

Were there other people who had plastic houses?

Yes. Some people had pole and dagga (mud) walls and a plastic roof while some had both the walls and the roof in plastic. Some had plastic roofs and then they also thatched the houses.

Did the roofs leak?

Some did. When it started raining you would see lots people on the roofs fixing them. Some woke up and found all the belongings wet. The lucky ones were those whose houses had secure roofs like my sister-in-law's house. We were like people with a nice house in the rural area. Some unfortunate ones spent most of the night standing on a rainy night.

So did you have to tell lodgers to build their houses in a certain way or to a certain quality?

We built the houses and then rented them out.

Does that mean that the lodgers had failed to get stands on their own?

Some of the lodgers could not get stands because by the time they arrived all the stands were gone.

Was it possible to find lodgers who worked?

Yes. Many of them worked. In the morning we saw many people going to work. As I told you earlier not all the people at Chirambahuyo had fled from the war. Some had been living in Harare or Chitungwiza and had moved into Chirambahuyo hoping that that would facilitate them to get stands because there were rumours that the was going to give houses to squatters.

Did you give birth to any of your children there?

No.

Were did women go for delivery?

There was a clinic there. As time went on they had established a Red Cross Clinic right there in Chitungwiza. So babies went there for their vaccinations. Those who were pregnant had to go to the clinic in Zengeza.

They were allowed to go there?

Yes. We saw them coming back with their babies.

Did they have to pay?

Yes. But the fee was very little I do not know how much.

Did you pay at the Red Cross Clinic?

No. When you or your child was not feeling well you just went to that Clinic and everything was free.

Where did children go to for school?

There was a school in Zengeza. I can't remember which one. That was where my sister-in-law's children went to. I think it was Zengeza 2 or 3. As long as he had a birth certificate he could go to school. Even when you did not have a birth certificate he could go to school and the parents would get him a certificate later. My sister-in-law's children had transferred from Mutare and they were going to school there in Zengeza.

Where did they bury their dead?

They sent them to the mortuary to Harare Hospital.

How about Chitungwiza General?

It was not yet there. When you were seriously ill you also could go to Harare Hospital. You could also go to Makoni Clinic.

Where did you give birth to your second child?

In Mutare, but that was before independence. That was in '78. I was in Mutare then. The rest were born here in Harare. There was one in '80, then in '83 and the last two girls. They were all born here.

Were there any donors who gave people food or clothes?

I saw people getting blankets in Chirambahuyo. They got them from the Muzorewa people. They also gave people peanut butter and 50kg maize-meal and some soap. Sithole also gave some people some food. They used to send trucks packed with food to Chirambahuyo. My sister-in-law used to receive peanut butter, a 50kg bag of maize-meal, cooking oil, beans. They counted the number of children you had.

You never got any?

No.

Why not?

I do not know what they were looking for. I would have qualified because they were giving food to other poor people.

So why did your sister-in-law receive the donated food when your brother-in-law was working?

They were just favored.

Where there squatter leaders?

I never saw them.

How did you know the exact size of your stand?

It was pegged by the Chitungwiza Town Council and you knew the exact measurements. You did not even have to put a boundary. You just knew how far your yard went. They were very small stands.

Could you grow crops on your stand?

There was no space. There was no space for vegetables. You could only find space to throw the ashes. If you wanted to grow crops you had to go across the road and ask the people there for some piece of land. That was where my sister-in-law and I used to grow crops.

Did the Chirambahuyo people steal crops from the Mayambara villagers?

No. At that time people did not have the spirit to steal crops like they are doing here right now. They did not even steal their goats. The people from Mayambara used to come and sell their goat meat. No-one used to steal because meat was still cheap. Butchers used to send their workers on bikes to sell meat in Chirambahuyo.

Was there any baby dumping?

No. I never heard of any story of baby dumping.

Were shebeens allowed in Chirambahuyo?

No. Those who had shebeen were breaking the law. And they were arrested. The policemen used to go to Chirambahuyo and arrest them. We would hear the following day that some people were arrested. My sister-in-law used to drink. She used to tell us that the police had come and they had to run.

What was the most difficult for women at Chirambahuyo?

There were no jobs for women.

Couldn't they have gone to work kumayard or on the farm?

Women did not even think about it. Besides they had children to look after. Most of the people who were there had young children. They were of child bearing age. Some of the women who had run away from the war had children with strange men who were not known at home. Some never went back because they were embarrassed by the behavior when they were at Chirambahuyo.

Some divorced their husbands. It was hard. Some people were so much into town life that they refused to go back home when their husbands asked them to go back.

Thank you mama.