

# The Disabled: Only Differently Abled

by Julian Francis

A function in Chakoria last September related to a programme which the Dhaka-based NGO, SARPV (Social Assistance and Rehabilitation for the Physically Vulnerable), had carried out to alleviate the suffering of persons disabled and seriously injured as a result of the April cyclone, one of the speakers was Ms. Mohua Paul, Secretary of The Centre for the Rehabilitation of the Paralyzed, and NGO situated at Chapain near Savar.

Mohua Paul, who is a wheelchair user, focussed on the problems of women who are disabled. Pointing out that in a male-dominated society women are often marginalised and oppressed, she said that women doing household work are rarely appreciated for their dawn-to-dusk work as they often do not actually "earn" money. She referred to women who become disabled as being "doubly disabled". She also pointed out that any married woman who becomes disabled is often rejected by her husband and his family and in many cases by her own family which usually shows little understanding for her new situation.

Mohua went on to stress the need for urgent acceptance of the immunization programme of UNICEF/WHO and the Government as a means to eliminate diseases, such as Polio, which cause disability. She pointed out also that low quality and shortage of food can cause malnutrition which often leads to disability. Also, she said, it is very sad that if there is a disabled child in any family, the child is often the most neglected particularly if the child is female.

To put Mohua's very clear and accurate assessment of the situation in our present-day society of a woman who is disabled, in a wider and more global context, I have drawn on a recent article by Jackie Spoth, a Canadian woman who describes herself as a "physically-challenged feminist". In her article published by ISIS International, Jackie Spoth talks about having experienced the doubly negative implications of being female and disabled in "this patriarchal society". So, it is not only in male-dominated Bangladesh that women fell dominated and oppressed.

More than 500 million people in the world are disabled as a consequence of mental, physical, or sensory impairments. The purpose of the World Programme of Action declared for the UN Decade of Disabled Persons 1983-1992 is to promote effective measures for prevention of disabilities, rehabilitation and realization of the goals of full participation and equality of disabled people in the social and economic development process in their countries.

Rich nations can justifiably be proud of their high tech advancements. Many disabled persons in the rich countries have found training and employment in the wonderful

world of computers. But, in fact all the technology of modern ingenuity can do less to improve the lives of disabled people than a change in the social attitudes which have been born from ignorance, indifference and fear of the non-disabled population.

Social attitudes, whether internalized in public architecture and transport systems, can convert impairments into disabilities. For a person who has polio, society can make the impairment to that of "not being able to earn a living." For a person who is deaf, misunderstanding can convert the impairment of not being able to hear into the disability of not being educated. Far from being a homogenous group, people with disabilities are not defined by disability, and have different barriers to overcome

of the extended family disintegrates, the vocational plight of disabled persons becomes more severe. In urban slums throughout the world the competition for any economically productive activity is heavy. Thus many disabled persons are abandoned to become dependent, others resort to begging.

Any disabled woman anywhere in the world experiences the doubly negative implications of being female and disabled in the patriarchal society that exists virtually all over the world. Statistics reveal that women are exploited and oppressed as a class. Two out of three illiterate persons in the world are women.

Indeed, although comprising one half of the world's population, one third of the official labor force, and perform-

clitoridectomy would not have to suffer physical agony as a result of genital mutilation if patriarchal fears of women's sexuality could be calmed and women's rights to sexual fulfillment be recognized and accommodated. There are western fears of the fertility of developing world women that have resulted in massive dumps of contraceptives and sterilization campaigns that have caustically violated, injured, and disabled the bodies of women in developing countries, including Bangladesh.

However, western aid officials have never tried to understand the cultural realities in Bangladesh that dictate the necessity for women to give birth to preferably male children. It is a myth that poverty is caused by overpopulation. Poverty results from unjust

In certain parts of the world, a baby girl often receives only whatever food is left by her father and brothers. difficult as this may seem to fathom, there are known cases of extreme poverty where children, again especially so when they are female, may be deliberately maimed so that they can be made to beg. These seemingly medieval practices with even more cruelty on disabled women who tend to age more rapidly when the harvest is meagre and food allotted for the exclusive use of the young and healthy.

For almost all women in the world, marriage is the primary means of economic survival as well as achievement of social status. Disabled women in developing countries are often hidden from view by their families, not only seen as unmarriageable but also as a curse to other marriageable brothers and sisters.

Today's disabled women in developed and developing countries must see their roles over and beyond traditional family settings and clanishness. In self-help organizations of disabled persons, women are working to overcome the barriers that they face in their respective societies.

A Canadian women's organization called DAWN (Disabled Women's Network Canada) supports disabled women in their struggles to control their own lives. In the global struggle for reproductive freedom, DAWN and the Namibian Women's Voice have joined in protest to the use of Depo Provera. In solidarity, they have produced an informative booklet to raise consciousness of the issue. In over 80 countries around the world Depo Provera is given as a contraceptive to vulnerable women: Third World women, poor women, black women, and disabled women.

Disabled women are in the target group in order to stop periods and prevent pregnancies often for no other reason than for the convenience of institutions and caregivers. This drug is often given without the woman's consent nor with information about the harmful effects of the drug.

Much of what has been written above is depressing and shocking. I make no apologies for that. It is about time that the mostly male planners, politicians, donors and NGOs of every size and shape be shocked and shaken into some sense of reality so that they be galvanized into action to ensure that disabled persons, particularly women, are not discriminated against and that they have access to the same opportunities as non-disabled persons and that when they demand the same rights as you and I they are not denied.

Julian Francis is CUSO's Director for South Asia based in Dhaka. He has a special interest in the problems of disabled persons and campaigns vigorously with them.



Ms. Mohua Paul

in different ways. As you begin to see blind PhD students as well as blind beggars, you see that blindness does not define the person.

**There is no "blind person." Disabled people are different—as different as everybody else—as differently abled as you and I.**

It has been proven that there is a direct correlation between poverty and disability and, in fact 80% of the disabled population live in developing nations. Seventy per cent of these people live in inaccessible rural areas where the family is the primary support. When the family economy is based on agriculture and when the traditional extended family exists, it is quite possible for even the most disabled person to be given some useful tasks to perform.

However, as more rural families move to urban centres, as agriculture becomes more mechanized and commercialized, as money transactions replace barter systems and as the institution

ing nearly two-thirds of work done, the women of the world receive only one-tenth of the world's income and own less than one-hundredth of world property.

The potent combination of low status of women in some developing countries and poverty's grim consequences is now acknowledged as a major cause of disability. Disabled women are even more likely to be financially marginalised, socially rejected, given diminished access to food, health care, vocational training and education.

Many of the disabilities that impact on the lives of women are preventable. Women who develop visual impairments as a result of occupations in the electronics industry, weaving, garment industries and carpet making could have had such disabilities prevented if there were workplace, health, and safety laws in the host countries.

The 74,000,000 women who have had their sexuality disabled from the practice of

distribution of resources and wealth. Impairment of fertility can jeopardize a woman's place in the kinship network with the threat of divorce, thus placing a woman in an economically insecure state. Such anxieties give rise to mental illness, endemic to many Third World women.

When the food supply is meagre and limited, the priority that has long remained respected and unquestioned is always for the nutrition and health of the males of the family, the present and future breadwinners. By society's reckoning, women are considered to make little economic contribution — thus their unobtrusive place on the last rung of established priorities.

Not at all considered are the number of domestic chores the woman is expected to accomplish to keep a home going, her own health needs, which ultimately affects the children's, and her very dignity as a person which entitles her to the very same things in life that a man has.

# "Bangladesh is no 'Basket Case'"

by Fayza Haq

JULIAN Francis of the CUSO, who has been working in the Subcontinent for nearly 25 years now, has been totally immersed in the work of development in Bangladesh for a number of years. Discussing the target of foreign aid he said, "I think I would like a much more open debate as far as Bangladesh is concerned because it is very easy for the donors to say that the main reason for poverty is the overpopulation and I believe there could be a lot of research done on that."

"The reason," he added "is the unequal distribution of resources of population. I have a

big problem in accepting the black and white, cut and dried analyses of many of the foreign donors."

How best does he think that Bangladesh can be developed? Mr. Francis replied, "Just as the disabled in the country have not been speaking out, I find many occasions aid programmes are implemented without talking to the local people. I am not saying that foreign aid is not required. There are many countries that require foreign assistance but I don't see Bangladeshis have as

much opportunity to have an input into a lot of development projects."

"I find it said," he continued, "that when foreign aid packages come through, and because they are package deals, there are positions that could be perfectly done by qualified Bangladeshis because it is money coming from a different country. In some cases foreign experts are needed but not necessarily all the time. I often find, especially in the rural areas, that locally qualified experts could do the same job."

Speaking in the same vein he continued, "There is a world wide worry over ecology and the world has been ruined by the greedy west. If we talk to the people of Chittagong Hill Tracts and Cox's Bazaar, we know that they know a lot about trees than what foreign experts do. This is where we are making mistakes because we feel that people are uneducated villagers they are ignorant and illiterate. Without formal education you have the knowledge over the generations. This is why development in places like Bangladesh is going wrong. We have thrown traditional and local wisdom out of the window, and replaced them with what we have learnt in the class-room knowledge. There is a small group realising this and we are back to the basics and this can only be good."

In his development work Mr. Francis has had "inspirations from other NGOs, government officials, journalist, people working in the Dhaka University and from people of all walks of life. They have always been interested in development problems, and enquire what I am contributing as a foreigner. 'Are we gaining

more or are you gaining more from this work?' they quiz me frankly. I think probably I've been outspoken in criticising the number of foreigners who 'assist' development works in Bangladesh.

Dwelling on the image of Bangladesh abroad, Mr. Francis commented, "I think that the west has a distorted picture of Bangladesh — possibly going back to the famous Henry Kissinger 'basket case' analysis. The eastern media, particularly the media in North America writes about Bangladesh only when there is a disaster. In Europe and particularly in Britain, there is more awareness of Bangladesh because of the historical connections, and also because of the large community of Bangladeshis who live and work in England. Whenever I have been giving interviews in Canada, where the CUSO head office is situated, I've been stressing on the positive side of Bangladeshis, their resilience and warmth. There is a feeling that some way they have been suppressed."

He added "I feel such sadness that there is so much potential in the land and the people and somehow the country has not risen up. Perhaps this is connected with foreign pressures. I'm not pessimistic at all about the future of Bangladesh."

What are the problems that he faces while at work in Bangladesh? "I don't face problems of any great consequence. There were frustrations in 1990 because of all the political unrest. But there has never been a situation that we were unable to work due to lack of cooperation from the government," he replied.

Mr. Francis continued, "Nearly all the time I'm

impressed with the calibre of the officers that we have had to deal with and that is particularly true with the people of the Ministry of Social Welfare in connection with the disabled."

He added, "I don't find any problem in living or working in Bangladesh except the difficulties everybody faces when it is hard to move around. In the last twenty-four years in the Subcontinent I have never had to consult a doctor for any stomach problems. I have a minor stomach problem. I go on rice, 'tok do', lime juice and banana. If it is bad I take O.R.S. but I take no medicines like antibiotics. I've never had malaria either, and I've never needed antimalarials. I am uncomfortable sometimes in the evening, if I don't have my socks on. On one occasion of



Julian Francis

# Water Debate Strains Zimbabwe Political Unity

by Charles Rukuni

SINCE Zimbabwe became independent in 1980, things have rarely gone well for its second largest city, Bulawayo. Home to about 850,000 people, it has seen more than its share of civil strife since majority rule. Now it faces the combined prospect of serious water shortages and renewed local discontent with the national government.

Bulawayo's post-independence troubles began in November 1980, only six months after the end of a 14-year war against the former white minority government. That month, a mini-war broke out in a suburb between former combatants of rival independence movements.

Three months later, Bulawayo witnessed a second, more devastating battle between former freedom fighters. The fighting threatened to spread nationwide and was ruthlessly checked, mainly by former Rhodesian soldiers.

After a year's calm, in February 1982 the government discovered huge arms caches on properties owned by the opposition Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) in and around Bulawayo. Thus began five years of turmoil and stagnation for the city, then ruled by ZAPU councillors.

Investment stopped, property prices stagnated, and the municipal council was not granted its fair share of central government funds to improve its water supply system and other facilities.

In December 1987 a unity accord was signed between ZAPU and the governing Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF).

Dissident activities ended six months later. Bulawayo's eight years of ordeal and isolation seemed at an end.

Millions of dollars in investment poured in. New factories, grain silos, a textile mill, and a hotel school were built, and plans finalised for a second national university. In

three years, property prices almost quintupled.

Today, however, this boom is likely to be brought to an abrupt halt. The city has become so short of water that by mid-December it had only 19 weeks' supply left. Sadly, politics is once again depriving Bulawayo people of one of life's necessities.

Like all colonial institutions,

**When Zimbabwe's two main political parties signed a unity accord in 1987, hopes were high that long-standing animosity between the nation's two main regions would end. But today, reports Gemini News Service, the main city in Matabeleland region, Bulawayo, faces serious water shortage — and the national government's failure to support a major pipeline project is fuelling renewed political discontent in the region.**

Bulawayo's water supply system was set up for a small population of white settlers and a small black population that was officially regarded as migratory.

Realising the growing population would strain the city water supply, the post-independence council sought funding from the national government to build a pipeline from supply dams 47 kilometres to the north.

In 1982, the project would have cost only \$89 million, but relations between ZAPU and ZANU-PF were at their lowest ebb at the time, and the council did not get the go-ahead.

Only seven years later did the national government approve the project, and it took another two years to award a tender. By then, the cost of the

pipeline had risen to \$284 million. Worse, the supply dams can no longer meet the city demands and new sources are needed.

One suggestion is to build a canal or pipeline from the Zambezi River. The project, on the cards since the Twenties, would cost an estimated \$1.6 billion, which central government says it cannot afford.

Bulawayo has instead settled for a new dam in Nkayi, about 160 kilometres away. Under pressure from local politicians, the central government agreed in principle to support that project, but has since dilly-dallied.

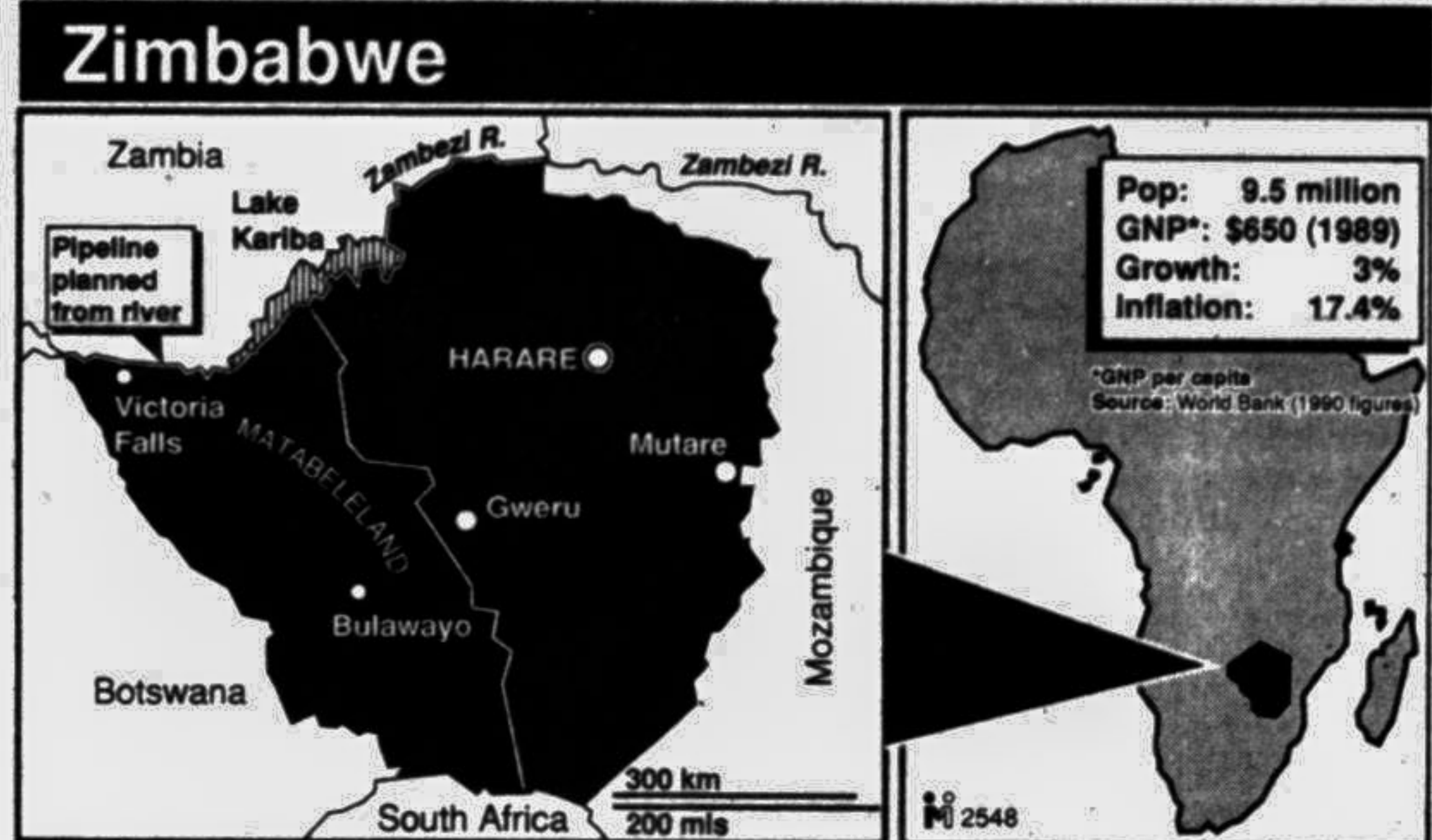
Aware that the issue could cost them support, leading Matabeleland politicians — including Vice President Joshua Nkomo and Home Affairs Deputy Minister Dumiso Dabengwa — have set up a committee to examine the question.

In July, consultants hired by the committee concluded that a pipeline carrying water to Bulawayo from the Zambezi River could be built within a year at a cost of either \$215 million or \$290 million.

The cheaper option would be a 50-megallitre pipeline supplying Bulawayo only, they said, while the more costly alternative would be a larger 350-megallitre pipeline supplying the city and other parts of Matabeleland. The price tag for that project has since been revised to \$1.3 billion because of the weakening Zimbabwe dollar.

The proposal was sent to Harare, but the government again balked, saying it could not afford such a project.

Studies have concluded that building the larger pipeline could create about 210,000 jobs, provide a livelihood for more than a million dependants and inject \$2400 million a year into the local economy. Encouraged by these predictions, Dabengwa and Matabeleland North Governor Jevan Masoko have joined local



# Children's Brigade Takes on Sugarcane Pests

Children in Kannur, north India, are involved in an innovative scheme to combat pests invading the local sugarcane crop without using pesticides, reports Ramesh Dutt Sharma from New Delhi.

Each morning they collect pest-infested leaves in the canals. They bundle up the leaves and exchange them for small amounts of cash at the nearby Simhawali Sugar Mill, which publicly burns the leaves at the mill gates.

Sugarcane in the region has been hit badly by the Gurdaspur borer and Aegia top borer, which can reduce yields by up to 25%. Many small farmers cannot afford pesticides which in any case are often not available.

The initiative started in 1987. Says SK Taneja, agronomist at the Simhawali Mill: "Once introduced to what the larvae, pupae and moth of the pest look like, children soon identify and start collecting the leaves."

Initially, children were given sweets in exchange for the leaves. But, recalls Taneja, "we quickly realised that the children deserved more than that." Since the introduction of cash for leaves, the programme has grown.

Last year over 300 school-age children collected 120,000 leaves earning 85 rupees (US \$4.25) each. An attempt to include teachers was dropped when it was found that they were "swallowing" the money. The campaign has spread to 16 other villages in the area and the mill is looking into ways of involving farm labourers in the scheme.

Simhawali scientists have now started handing out cards impregnated with Trichogramma eggs for the children to drop in the fields while collecting leaves. It is hoped that the Trichogramma, an insect that feeds on larvae of the sugarcane pests, will contribute to curbing losses. (PANOS)

businessmen in setting up a trust fund to raise money for the project.

The response has been overwhelming. Companies from as far away as Harare have made pledges, some reaching \$1 million — and the fund has brought in almost \$6 million so far.

Senior politicians, aware that their conspicuous non-participation could cost them support, are now trying to elbow their way in on the project, accusing Dabengwa and Masoko of trying to make political capital out of it.

Political Affairs Minister Didymus Mutasa and his deputy, Welshman Mabhena, who is from Matabeleland, have accused the committee of jumping the gun, saying Bulawayo's water supply should be a government responsibility.

Bickering over the project is likely to cost people like Joshua Nkomo, Joseph Msika, Mabhena and other politicians from the region popular support.

Analysts predict a showdown if the government tries to stop the project, which backers want started in July. Dabengwa and Masoko could be thrown out of the ruling party, though they would remain local heroes.

Political scientist Jonathan Moyo has even warned that the government attitude could fuel a secessionist movement. Any politician worth his salt, he says, should be associated with the project.

Matabeleland politicians who complain they have been left out recognise the importance of being associated with it. But they seem to find it too difficult to swallow their pride and join Dabengwa and Masoko.

— Gemini News

(Charles Rukuni edits a newsletter in Bulawayo. He was previously Harare editor of Moto, a Zimbabwean weekly, and deputy news editor of the Bulawayo Chronicle.)