

Seeds of Tzu Chi Take Root in Southern Africa

Written by Tzu Chi Foundation

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The work of the Tzu Chi Foundation is spreading in Zimbabwe and Lesotho, two of the poorest countries in southern Africa, thanks to the hard work of commissioners from Taiwan and the local volunteers whom they have inspired.

Zimbabwe

The first volunteer in Zimbabwe was Chu Ching-cai who migrated there in 1995 and set up a clothing factory. Through their hard work, he and his wife earned substantial amount of money from their business. However, the political situation in 2006 and 2007 deteriorated, with many street demonstrations. The stores and factory owned by the Chu's were looted and they suffered heavy losses. At that time, he was bewildered: "why do I have to live with the bad luck of being looted four times?" he asked himself. But he quickly changed his perspective and decided to create good karma through giving. He stopped feeling sorry for himself and began helping locals in need.

He came to know Tzu Chi through watching Da Ai television programs in 2006; a year later, he joined the relief distributions. For years, he was eager to participate in Tzu Chi events and had to make the long journey between Zimbabwe and South Africa to take part in volunteer trainee courses. He is grateful to the Tzu Chi volunteers in South Africa -- Pan Ming-Shui, Shi Hong-Qi and Tsai Ching-chou – for leading him through the courses. After each of them, his determination to become a Tzu Chi commissioner became stronger.



Zimbabwe has suffered from some of the highest inflation rates in the world. It rose from an annual rate of 32 per cent in 1998 to a high of 11, 200,000 per cent in August 2008. This drove many people to destitution and increased the rate of unemployment. Local people could not afford to buy food. Chu could not bear to see them suffering and started to collect donated food to villages in remote areas and caring for the needy. In particular, Chu looked after a lady named Moira who had had an operation: after she recovered, she joined the distributions with Chu. He was touched and said: "Because of our help, now Moira is also able to help others in need."

There was one village with poor sanitation: its residents had white ringworm, fleas and other afflictions. When Chu learnt of the situation, he invited local barbers to cut the hair of the villagers and give them treatment. They were touched by Chu's actions and started to help him. Now Zimbabwe has its own local volunteers and Chu said: "There are 70 to 80 local volunteers and more people join us whenever we conduct a distribution or cook hot meals."

To ensure the safety of the distributions and cooking the meals, Chu always invites his

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employees to help. After they saw what he has been doing for their people, they are willing to join the distributions. Chu said: "We do not have many Tzu Chi volunteers in local areas and it is not easy to do Tzu Chi events in Zimbabwe. So I have to double my efforts to invite more local bodhisattvas to join our Tzu Chi family."

He has just made a marathon 24-hour journey from Zimbabwe to Taiwan, traveling via Johannesburg and Hong Kong, to take part in the "2011 Tzu Chi Overseas Commissioners and Tzu Cheng Spiritual Training Camp". He is full of energy despite the long flight. He is keen to learn the Dharma at this camp and share his experiences in Zimbabwe with other participants from overseas. Among them are local volunteers from Lesotho, who are also very enthusiastic to attend the camp and learn more about the Master's teaching.

Lesotho

Lesotho is a small country surrounded by the Republic of South Africa which always suffers from drought. Its living conditions are worse than those in South Africa. It has one Tzu Chi commissioner, Chen Mai-juan, who established a clothing factory in Lesotho. For her job, she always has to travel between there and South Africa. Her work gave her the opportunity to introduce Tzu Chi to local people. This inspired three local volunteers to join her in her charity work; they in turn inspired a further 30 people to take part.



Lesotho is a poor country; no-one in the villages can afford the cost of installing a television. So, in June this year, Chen asked five local Tzu Chi volunteers and a village chief to help buy televisions and install satellites to watch Da Ai television programs. Now they invite people in the village to watch the programs together every day and understand what Tzu Chi is doing in the whole world. They can understand the ideal of great love -- "everyone can be a good person and do good deeds".

Among the volunteers is Susan, 46, who has been manager of the human resources department at Chen's clothing factory for over 10 years. A single mother, she works hard to raise her children. In addition, she devotes herself to charity work and hopes that her own children can grow up healthily. She has also adopted two orphans and cares for them as her own children.

Although she lives in an unstable and drought-affected country, Susan is touched by Dharma Master Cheng Yen's great love spreading around the world. She puts this inspiration into action and helps poor families in the villages. She always shares the latest Tzu Chi news and stories of volunteers with local people. Every night, she watches Da Ai Headlines in English and asks her son to record the news. Then Susan can share what he has recorded with her neighbors, so that they know more about the philosophy of Tzu Chi and can invite more volunteers to join the Bodhisattva path.

Although Zimbabwe and Lesotho are far from Taiwan, the seeds of love of Tzu Chi are

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spreading among local people. We hope that these seeds will not be limited by borders and will lay deep roots in many countries.

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