

Havana Soup Kitchen & Community Support 2014

Newsletter & Photos by Michaela Fink, Pallium e.V.

Hunger and illnesses are part of the everyday experience of many Namibians. If it was not for the many initiatives in and around Windhoek and in the rural areas of Namibia, which are mainly launched by women, the daily misery would reach dramatic levels. One could document countless stories of the "misery of the world" (Pierre Bourdieu) in a rich country. Frieda, who started a soup kitchen in Havana, a suburb of Katutura, can tell one story after another, for example this one:

Hendrina was neglected by her mother ("she was thrown away") when she found out that her baby was HIV-positive. When Hendrina's mother was pregnant with her, she did not go to the hospital because she did not want her status to be revealed. Therefore the child was born HIV-positive. The treatment to prevent mother-to-child transmission (MTCT) must begin early in pregnancy. Hendrina's father died, probably due to the "illness" (HIV/AIDS). After the birth of Hendrina, the mother disappeared and left the girl behind. Selma, the sister of Hendrina's father heard what the family members said about Hendrina: "It is nothing but a dying child." The family was of the opinion that the mother had abandoned the baby because she did not want the child to die in her arms. This all happened in northern Namibia, in the "Ovamboland", a name that was given to this region during the colonial times. The father's sister then brought Hendrina to Katutura.

After Selma took in the child and thereby saved it from death, she spent several months with Hendrina in the ICU. Hendrina was underweight ("she looked so skinny") and had worms in her ears which caused a terrible smell. Selma says: "The nurse grabbed me by the collar and insulted me terribly because the child was in such a bad state". Selma defended herself: "No, no, that's not my child, I have only taken it. Let me explain!"

Hendrina gradually recovered and now lives with her aunt Selma in Havana. Selma brought her to Frieda's soup kitchen where she gets some food every working day and plays, sings and learns with the other children.

Lovisa lives in the same house as Hendrina. Her mother is alive and loves the child, but she is sick and works as a domestic worker. She therefore cannot look after Lovisa herself. Just like Hendrina, Lovisa was also born HIV-positive. The mother also thought (just as Hendrina's mother did) that Lovisa would die. But both, Hendrina and Lovisa survived. Hendrina and Lovisa now both take their medication. Selma, the woman who takes care of them, now also looks after a whole lot of other children. Strictly speaking that is nothing special. Many women in Namibia started such initiatives, not because they were ordered to do so, but

simply because they could not accept the suffering of the children. Today this often happens in Namibia: the birth of a caring initiative by viewing the terror and distress of children. By now Selma even labelled her hut. It says: "Day Care Center".



*Selma lives with 12 children in the corrugated iron hut.
Only two children are her own. The rest of the children are adopted.*



The house is located in Havana, Windhoek-Katutura.

More than 40 children benefit from Frieda's soup kitchen in Havana. With the help of cooker Berta and German Red Cross volunteers, who are regularly involved into the work, Frieda is feeding the children from Monday to Friday with breakfast and lunch.

Frieda and Berta, two warm-hearted, powerful women, do an impressive work with the kids, teaching them health education, English, bible studies and other pre-primary skills. Often the kids just play, sing and dance together to the delight of the neighbors.

There is a need of funds amounting to N\$ 8.000 per month to cover costs for food, water, transport, gas, municipality services, working and playing materials for the children, office, maintenance of the house and garden, and for the small salaries for manager Frieda, cooker Berta, and security Boni.



Havana Soup Kitchen, Windhoek-Katutura



Founder and manager Frieda Kemuiko-Geises



Cooker Berta



Shacks in Havana: The homes of the children.

Meetings and workshops with parents take place on a regularly basis. Frieda offers counseling to the parents and teaches them how to start and to run a small business in order to create a minimum of self-sustainable existence (for example with selling home-made bread or self made soap).

And, since Frieda is a well known community member of Havana, an increasing number of people ask for help at the soup kitchen. Frieda has started to build up a community support system in order to provide the most vulnerable and needy families with food and other essentials for living, like soap, blankets, mattresses and plastic sheeting to fix iron huts, which are often leaking. During the rainy seasons many families sleep without mattresses and blankets just on the wet and muddy ground of their shack.

The biggest challenges are the lack of food and shelter. Frieda would love to further expand the community support, which is urgently needed. With an amount of N\$ 5.000 per month a basic support system could be established in future.



Frieda's community support in Havana