



## The Construction of an Early Childhood Development Ablution Block and the Provision of Essential Safety Features at Zimbabwe's Hwange Main Camp Primary School

### Introduction and Project Location:

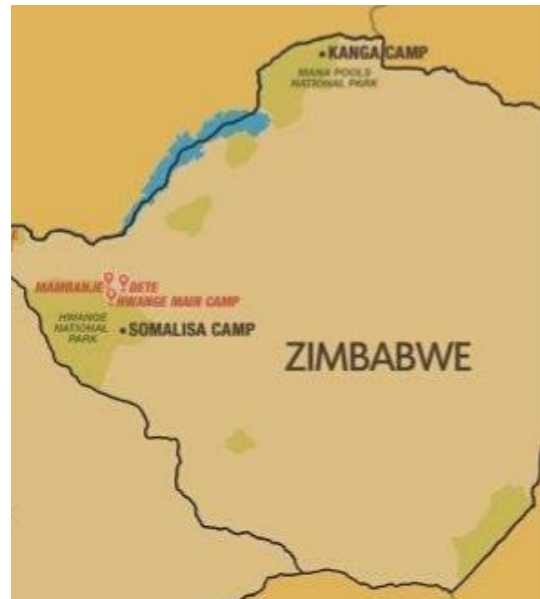
Hwange Main Camp is situated at the main entrance in the southern part of Zimbabwe's Hwange National Park. The community here consists mainly of National Parks employees and their families in a predominantly communal setting.

Hwange Main Camp Primary School serves this community of roughly 170 households.

### Project Background and Context

Investments in early childhood development (ECD) interventions have very high returns, but this is not always immediately visible or obvious. Some of the benefits of ECD interventions occur only later in life once children receive subsequent investments such as quality primary and secondary education. A young child's brain can form up to 1000 neural connections every second. This brain-building process is shaped by a combination of nature and nurture and lays the foundation for cognitive and social development.

Growing up in a situation of poverty, which is the case for an estimated two out of three young children in Zimbabwe, influences their survival, growth, and opportunities for Education. This has far-reaching implications and can perpetuate a cycle of disadvantage and inequity that can continue for generations. Poor Early Childhood Development thus contributes to cycles of poverty and hinders efforts to overcome key development challenges such as economic inequality and unemployment.



When school infrastructure in Hwange Main Camp was developed, Early Childhood Development (ECD) classes were not yet adopted within the national curriculum, resulting in a gap in age-appropriate infrastructure. One of the areas where this gap is most severe, is the absence of appropriate ablution facilities for the classes of roughly 30 ECD A and ECD B children. A further area of concern is the absence of safety features. A former storeroom has been allocated as a classroom to the ECD classes, but the surrounding area remains open to the National Park. This results in a dangerous situation whereby wild animals freely roam into the ECD play area and surrounds.

The ECD classes must currently share a single communally used adult squat toilet located nearby. The primary concern is for the health of the young children. Zimbabwe has been affected by typhoid and cholera in recent years, both of which can be contracted through exposure to unsanitary conditions, such as crowded communal ablutions and the absence of appropriate sanitary facilities such as hand washing basins. Young children are especially at risk and stand a higher chance of becoming critically ill or experiencing delayed recoveries, which can have long-term negative effects on a child's development.

Research clearly indicates that the early years are critical for a child's development. From birth to seven years of age is a period of rapid physical, mental, emotional, social and moral growth and development. ECD services should be holistic and incorporate the child's health, nutrition, education and psychosocial needs. From an environmental perspective, this includes access to safe water and basic sanitation. For children ages three to six, a minimum of one toilet and one hand-washing facility should be provided for every 10 children.

The African Bush Camps Foundation and Hwange Main Camp Primary School have a long-standing relationship. The Foundation has been working with the school since 2015 to improve equitable access to education, mobilise resources, build capacity and improve school infrastructure.

These efforts have been fruitful as shown by the increase in the school's pass rate in its Gr 7 National Exams as well as an increase in enrolment, improved retention of teachers and a reduction in absenteeism.

As identified by the School and community, the next priority area to be addressed is the lack of appropriate facilities and safety precautions for Early Childhood Development classes.

Our aim through this project is therefore to construct an age-appropriate ablution block dedicated to the ECD classes, which will greatly reduce the health risks the children face. A further area of concern is that the ECD area is not fenced in, with the classroom and playground area open to wandering wild animals, which are a common occurrence in the National Park. The Foundation and the School therefore identified that in addition to the construction of an ablution facility, the entire ECD area must be fenced in order to keep the children safe.