



Enos Chihota and a friend rest before they cross into Zimbabwe

# Long way from home

by Fidelis Zvomuya

**Enos Chihota, a 30-year-old illegal Zimbabwean farm worker, takes a bumpy, dusty, dirt road just outside Musina as he heads towards his usual illegal crossing point.**

The man from Guruve Zimbabwe, some 200 km north of Harare is heading home. With his bags stuffed with rice, sugar, mealie meal, soap and other basic needs, he is off to see his family. Chihota works on a farm in Limpopo, but every official holiday and month end, he goes back to Zimbabwe, carrying the bare necessities and some money to pay for his children's school fees. "It's hard work in the fields, but at the same time, it's also good because it's honourable work," he says.

"But longing and hopefulness are the more definitive aspects of life here. At least I can afford to buy stuff for my family, feed them and send my children to school, a thing most farm workers in Zimbabwe can not afford," he says.

He walks the long, slow journey that will take him from Musina by foot to the Limpopo River, then by swimming through the crocodile-infested river he will cross the porous boarder fence into Zimbabwe.

He has been taking this route since 2004 and is now used to it. For him, it is less trouble than crossing the border post. Without any form of legal documents, his very presence in South Africa poses the questions: Would you do it? Would you, could you, leave your family to provide for them in another country?

"The work is hard, but I have no option. I have a responsibility as a father," he says, showing what is probably his most valued possession, a couple of pictures. One is of his wife, Maria, and another is of his seven-month-old son, Farai. The words on the back of the picture say, "To Daddy Enos." Daddy Enos's smile is broad as he shows off the photos.

More than one million Zimbabweans work on South African farms. Most of the men, in fact, learn of the work through friends or relatives, someone who can vouch for their reliability, work ethic and honesty. Chihota earns more than R1 200 per month, enough to feed himself here and his family back home. Chihota's oldest son is completing his first year at university. Chihota's wife used to implore him in nearly every telephone call to come home during the early years. "She didn't like it," he says of their separation. "She always used to tell me, 'Come back. Come back. You need to be here.'" He says he feels the separation acutely when he speaks to his children over the phone.

"It's hard to be here," he says. "It's hard when I talk to my children, especially the younger ones." But Chihota's message to the family is always the same. "I tell them we need to make some money," he says. **UMI**



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