

Lessons from Zimbabwe

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ORLEANS - The United States and Zimbabwe both use the dollar, but the two currencies are oh, so different.

"You can buy candy with \$100 bill or a \$500 bill," said Harvard doctoral student Ticha Changamire of conditions in his home country. "You can buy a pair of jeans for \$1 million."

The real-life testament to inflation drew gasps from the Cape Cod Lighthouse Charter School students listening to Changamire and fellow Harvard student Tsitsi Gora talk about life in Zimbabwe Wednesday.

Students from Joanne Amaru's seminar class have been communicating with students from Arundel School in Zimbabwe and fund-raising through The Brick Project, a program developed by Kenya native Karim Ajania to bring youths together from around the world.

Lighthouse students are working with schools in Lithuania and India along with Zimbabwe, but Wednesday was the first time they met people from Zimbabwe. The Arundel headmistress, Gill Alcock, is scheduled to visit the school May 4.

"I was totally impressed," seventh-grader Andrew Smith said. "I learned so much information."

Changamire was born in a rural town of southern Zimbabwe, but attended boarding school after his parents moved to the capital city of Harare when he was a child. After graduating from the University of Zimbabwe medical school, he worked as a doctor before coming to Harvard to pursue his doctorate.

He said that not everyone in his homeland is poor, that in fact there are both rich and poor people in the country.

"The gap between, especially now, is widening," he said.

As Zimbabwe was a British colony until gaining independence in 1980, Changamire said there is a British influence.

"The type of building you'd find in London, you'd find a similar building in parts of Harare," he said.

But the fashion, he said, is strictly American-inspired.

"Whatever you see Beyoncé or Jennifer Aniston or Brad Pitt wearing, that's what they try to wear," he said.

Part of the work the Lighthouse students have been doing is raising money for a squatter colony in Zimbabwe, largely through selling paper from a paper mill in the colony through Zizini Arts & Crafts in Hyannis. The school's select chorus also recorded a song from the country and raised \$200 to get the paper mill running again.

"I'm very impressed by the work you're doing," Changamire said.

Gora is a graduate of the Arundel School, coming to Harvard in 2001.

"Oh, my god, it was terrible," she said of her first days in America. "All that you've known for 18 years is gone and inaccessible."

And when she first came, she could not speak her native Shona language.

"Now it's so sad for me, because I hardly ever speak Shona any more," she said.

Gora's senior thesis is on the ancient Great Zimbabwe Monument, the stone building believed to be the home of the king and the spirit medium, who conducted rain, fertility and harvest celebrations and linked residents to their ancestors. The walls are a meter thick in some spots, but there is no foundation.

"To me, it's quite remarkable that it's still standing," she said.

Unfortunately, Gora said that while a lot of physical evidence from the monument still exists, there was no oral tradition after the kingdom fell.

"A lot of the meaning of the place has been lost," she said.

Growing up, Gora said her parents were always worried when she takes public transportation, but she does it in Boston without thinking twice. The flip side, Changamire said, is that a 10-minute wait for the T is no big deal.

"At home, we can wait 30 minutes to an hour for public transport," he said.