Grandparents as parents: Skipped-generation households coping with poverty and HIV in rural Zambia
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Three households, three stories

Introduction

This chapter is the first of four chapters that focus on households, in particular on skipped-generation households. The case-studies presented in this chapter paint a picture of the situation in three skipped-generation households, providing the reader with an insight into what life in such a household is like. The case studies show how different the skipped-generation households in Misangwa are. At the same time, they also show how many similarities there are between these households and how their histories share common events. These cases will also be used to identify some of the issues that influence the development and sustainability of the well-being of these households. The case studies touch upon the history, make-up, income, social relations, and well-being of the members of these households. The final section presents a discussion of some of the issues that emerge from the case studies.

Bana Ebenah’s household

I met Bana Ebenah during my master’s research in Misangwa in 2001, and when I returned in 2008 I went to the homestead where she lived and found her still there. Ebenah was born around 1939 and so was about 64-years-old when I first visited her in 2001. She did not know her exact date of birth, but by matching the stories she shared about events that she remembered during her childhood (most notably the period of hunger caused by the migration of red locusts in the early 1940s) I was able to estimate her approximate year of birth. She married in 1955
and her husband died in the mid-1980s, just after their last child was born. Together they had six children: two sons (John and Bryce) and four daughters (Manrime, Beauty, Rosalia, and Tennible). In 2008, Beauty was the only child still alive. She was living in Eastern Province with her husband and children. Ebenah and her daughter had not seen each other for many years since neither had the money to pay for the journey to visit one another.

The death of Ebenah’s husband, probably as a result of diabetes-related complications, was the first of a series of deaths in Ebenah’s family. Her favourite brother disappeared in 1992, when he was in the bush on a hunting trip. She suspects that he was killed by a wild animal. In the following years, two sons and two daughters died. Her description of the illnesses and deaths of three of them suggest that they died of HIV-related causes. The first to die was her second born son Bryce. He died in the late 1990s. After his death, his wife turned to Ebenah for support and joined the household with her two children, Gina and Kelvin.

Not long after she joined the home, Ebenah’s daughter-in-law also became ill. After a lengthy illness, during which Ebenah was her primary caregiver, she died. Gina and Kelvin remained in the household and Ebenah became their guardian. While she was caring for her dying daughter-in-law, her youngest daughter, Tennible, also became sick. As Tennible’s health deteriorated, Ebenah again became the primary caregiver. Tennible lived with her mother, together with her six-month-old baby boy named Francis. When she eventually died, Francis remained with his grandmother.

At that time in 2001, Ebenah had three grandchildren living in her household whom she cared for. She said that despite all the adversity she had experienced, this period stood out as an extremely painful and difficult one for her. This, she explained, was because her grandson Frances was a very young baby. She was unable to care for him properly and he died, not long after his mother passed away. Ebenah explained how she had done her best to care for her daughter and her baby grandson but was unable to save either of them:

I tried to care for them both but the care for a sick and dying person and the feeding of a child was too much! We had so much suffering and when my daughter died, we had no money left. I am old and could not be a mother like I was once during the time I was young ... We had no money and no cows or goats so I didn’t have any milk. I could not go to the shop to buy even a small packet of milk due to lack of money. The baby was never a healthy baby and without milk to feed him, he had no chances at life ... I buried him behind the house near that anthill.

In 1999, Rosalia, Ebenah’s third daughter, was left by her husband. She was the mother of three children: Albert, Lydia, and Royce. Shortly after he left her, Rosalia fell ill, but she remained in her own home, where her sister Manrime cared for her. Eventually, after a long period of being bedridden, Rosalia died.
Rosalia’s children were brought to Ebenah’s home by their father’s relatives and she assumed guardianship of them.

For several years, Ebenah cared for the five grandchildren by herself. But then the household composition changed: the two oldest grandchildren, Gina and Kelvin, left the household in 2005 and 2006 respectively. Kelvin moved to town in search of work while his sister, Gina, married and moved to a village several kilometres from Ebenah’s house. This was a relief for Ebenah as she had fewer mouths to feed, but it also caused problems as Gina and Kelvin had helped her greatly when they were living at home.

In 2005, Ebenah’s eldest son, John, died in a minibus accident. He left a wife and three children. It was a sad time for her as she felt that she had lost her husband’s family line with the death of both of her sons. At the same time, she said that she was relieved that John’s children remained with their mother. She felt differently about her daughter’s Manrime’s children, who died in the follow year. The description of her death led me to believe that she died of tuberculosis. She had been sick for some time and when she was eventually taken to the hospital nothing could be done for her. Manrime’s children, Eireen, Constance, and Fred, were living with their father when their mother fell ill and died. Ebenah said:

I didn’t think it was right for a single man to raise the children by himself. They were too young to be with him since at that age children need a woman ...

She decided to collect the three children in 2006 and bring them to her own house where she could care for them.

In 2009, when I visited Ebenah again, her household consisted of seven people: herself and six grandchildren. The composition of the household in 2001 and 2009 are presented in Table 4.1.

Ebenah and her grandchildren lived in a small homestead consisting of eight houses occupied by four households. Ebenah was not related to the people living in the other households. The village had a cemented well which had been installed by the government several years earlier. The family lived in one of the eight houses. It was a small mud house with a thatched roof, approximately three by four metres in size. They had a large field of approximately two hectares within walking distance of the house. One boundary of the field had a small stream that provided a constant supply of water throughout the year. Their home was close to the Mission grounds, where the Basic School, Rural Health Centre, two hammer mills, and a small market were located. Just outside the Mission was a government-run agricultural camp, where people could buy fertilizer and seeds or sell their produce.

Ebenah was born and raised in Misangwa and most of her relatives still lived in the area. She named several brothers, sisters, and relatives who lived within
Table 4.1  Bana Ebenah’s household in 2001 and 2009

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Relationship</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th></th>
<th>Relationship</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sex</th>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Name</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bana Ebenah</td>
<td>Head</td>
<td>± 64</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Bana Ebenah</td>
<td>Head</td>
<td>± 72</td>
<td>Female</td>
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<td>Gina</td>
<td>Grandchild</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Living in Balako village</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelvin</td>
<td>Grandchild</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Left the household, now in town</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td>Daughter</td>
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<td>Female</td>
<td>Died</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
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<td>11</td>
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<td>Albert</td>
<td>Grandchild</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Grandchild</td>
<td>17</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Royce</td>
<td>Grandchild</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Royce</td>
<td>Grandchild</td>
<td>14</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Francis</td>
<td>Grandchild</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Died</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Eireen</td>
<td>Grandchild</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Constance</td>
<td>Grandchild</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Fred</td>
<td>Grandchild</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

walking distance of her home. She also had many friends and was acquainted with a lot of people. The problem, she explained, was that all of these people were also poor, and her brothers and sister were old like her and had no means to support her. Many of her close friends were also old and could not assist her. Others had died over the years. She depended on her grandchildren for help, especially Albert, who was the oldest grandchild in her home.

During the harvesting season in both 2008 and 2009, I noticed that the household used only a very small part of their land to grow maize; no more than ten square metres. Ebenah said that they did not use much of their vast land as they did not have an adequate supply of labour. This was a surprising comment on her part, as the household consisted of six grandchildren aged between 10 and 19 years; labour was not a problem that her household faced. As will be shown later, this comment was in fact an excuse to mask other issues. Maize was the only crop they grew and the rest of the land was covered in grass, shrubs, and the very persistent local grass called *Ulukoto*. According to people in the area, one cannot get rid of this grass without the use of chemicals. Ebenah confirmed this and explained that her household did not have money for such chemicals.

The household’s income was generated through different activities. As was the case for almost every household in Misangwa, agriculture was a primary source of cash. They sold as much as they could of the small amount of maize that they harvested yearly. Ebenah tried to supplement this income by selling Munkoyo beer that she brewed every two to four weeks. Albert, Royce, and Fred would also go fishing in the nearby stream or in the Kafue River several kilometres away. They sold fish to the local fishermen who travelled to the markets in Mpongwe. The granddaughters would sometimes forage for bushfoods, which they would sell. Often, however, they barely found enough to feed the family and
nothing could be sold. The socio-economic ranking of this household showed that it qualified as very poor (see Chapter Three for a detailed description of these rankings).

In 2008, when I saw Ebenah again after a seven year absence, I found an old and physically frail woman. During my visits it became clear that she was often sad and I got the impression that she was depressed. She had been affected by all the losses she had experienced during her life. In particular, the deaths that had occurred in her family weighed down on her. Not only was she always sad, but when I visited her home I often found her to be angry. She would curse others but also curse her fate:

What have I done for God to punish me like this? I have lost all these people and now in my old age I am living like this ... What did I do wrong? I am angry because I did not deserve to live this life, but, there is nothing I can do.

A problem in Ebenah’s house, which she never mentioned or talked about, was her own alcohol abuse. Anyone who visited her home regularly would have realised that she was an alcoholic. She was often drunk during my visits, sometimes as early as ten in the morning. Sober, she was a quiet and sad woman, but she became obnoxious and even aggressive when she was drinking. Her drinking was known in the community and I heard many stories and disapproving remarks from people who knew her. Despite her old age and frequent intoxication, Ebenah did everything she could to stay in control of her household. She wanted to decide how all things should be done. But while she believed that she was in control, the reality was that the children often went their own way and disregarded her wishes and commands.

The education of the grandchildren was a problem. Only Albert, the oldest, was attending school in 2009, and he was due to write his grade nine examinations in December. The other children were not in school, but Lydia had completed grade 7, Royce grade 5, and the youngest, Fred, was briefly in grade 1 in 2008. Fred had started schooling in January, but had dropped out before I visited the home in April that year. Ebenah said that they had no money to keep the children, except Albert, in school.

The children all looked healthy and none of them appeared to be malnourished. In private, they expressed to me their unhappiness about their grandmother’s drinking. They complained about this frequently, but they also felt that her desire to stay in control of them was hampering their own development. During the period in which I visited the home, I learnt that they had developed many

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1 As far as I can remember, Ebenah did not drink (or drink problematically) in 2001. My fieldwork notes from the time mention no issues with alcohol, even though I did find and record this in other households.
strategies to deal with this amongst themselves. At one point, they had decided to take matters into their own hands, as Lydia (aged 17 years) explained:

It is not that we don’t appreciate what she is to us, but you cannot wait for a drunken person like this. Fred is very young ... He never understood what was going on at that time. We felt so sorry but we were scared of our grandmother. She used to shout at us and tried to beat us with sticks. It is a good thing she is old, so she never managed to catch us! We had to look out for each other. Nowadays we wait for her to come home and if she doesn’t want to prepare anything, we just accept and stay quiet. Then when she sleeps we work together and cook something, so that we do not have to go to sleep hungry.

Based on both the stories that the grandchildren shared and my own observations, it became clear that it was Albert who headed the household with Lydia’s help. Together they decided what should be done and how best to deal with the difficult behaviour of their grandmother. Albert explained that her beer brewing activities cost them money rather than generating any:

She says she looks after the family by brewing beer ... I can tell you it is us who provide her with money to buy sugar and mealie-meal to brew that beer, since it is all given away. She drinks at other people’s places then those people will come to drink here. Nobody buys that beer; it is all to repay those people that have given her beer in a loan.

Earlier I described how the household used only a small portion of their land, and according to Ebenah this was because of problems with labour. I learned from the children that in fact she was the reason why they did not use more of their land, since she did not allow the grandchildren to farm unless they did exactly what she wanted them to do. On the small maize plot, they complied with this, though at the same time they disregarded her instructions and had started secretly to grow vegetables at the back of the field, out of sight of the home. They grew onions, tomatoes, cabbage, and green peppers along the banks of the stream. They were able to sell some of the vegetables, while the rest was for their own consumption. Ebenah had no idea of this and the children wanted to keep this a secret from her. Albert explained to me that because of her frequent intoxication, keeping this secret was easy. What was more challenging was preventing the youngest child in the home, Fred, from revealing their secret. They had managed in the past, and Albert and Lydia were confident that they would continue to manage. Lydia explained:

Fred is now getting older and he is beginning to understand what we are trying to do for ourselves. We have managed to keep our own books for so long. It will continue to become easier as he grows.

What was tricky, according to the children, was how they could bring produce from their garden into the home for consumption. They often managed to eat the food when they were compelled to cook for themselves because Ebenah was drunk. At other times, they would tell her that they had bought the food at the
market. She was suspicious at times, they said, but as far as I know she had not found out the truth.

My overall impression of this household was ambivalent. HIV and AIDS had had an immense impact on Ebenah and her grandchildren. The illness and death of almost all of her children required Ebenah to be the primary caregiver for a number of dying patients, and the guardian of more than 10 children over a period of 15 years. Her life history was a tragic story marked by poverty, death, suffering, and the loss of dreams and hopes. Whether her grief and despair drove her to drink I cannot say, but she was able to forget her grief and worries on a day-to-day basis by drinking. These problems related to alcohol were found to be common in many skipped-generation households; according to my observations, I noted such problems in at least a third of those studied. The situation in the household would have been more desperate were it not for the actions of her grandchildren. Through their hard work, ingenuity, and persistence, they were able to survive. The children cared for each other and their grandmother. They were able to pay for Albert’s schooling through their farming, fishing, and gardening.

Ba Thomson’s household

Ba Thomson and his wife were originally from North Western Province. They married when he was 24 and she 14. Following their marriage, they moved to Kitwe, one of the major towns in the Copperbelt Province, and lived there until Thomson lost his job in 1985. The couple had 11 children, two sons and nine daughters. When I got to know the couple in 2008, Thomson was 60 years old, and only five of their children were still alive.

Following Thomson’s forced retirement, they needed to decide what to do with their lives and with the money he had received on termination of his contract. They decided not to return to their traditional home and opted to settle in the rural areas of the Copperbelt Province. They ended up in Misangwa. When they arrived, they were strangers to the area and had to build up their farm and home. The first step, however, was to acquire land. Thomson explained that this at first seemed to involve little effort, but, as it turned out, the land they received came at a high price:

When I came here in 1995, I had to discuss with the chief if I would be allowed to settle on his land. He offered me three plots that I could choose from. We chose this place ... In return for the land the chief instructed me to work on his fields and to donate some of my harvest to his palace. When the chief saw that we knew how to farm and that we managed to cultivate a lot he called me to come to him. He told me that he had chosen me to be his personal advisor during the farming season. I had no choice but to oblige to what he asked. For three years, I worked for the chief.
Working as a personal advisor to the chief cost Thomson a lot of time and effort. This meant that he had less time to work on his own land and as a result the size of the family’s harvests shrunk and the family started to face problems of their own:

I started fearing we would end up hungry if I did not commit to my own survival. So, I decided to tell the chief I wanted to return to my farm and that I no longer wanted to be his advisor. Eventually he agreed to release me, but only after I worked for him for one more year.

At first, it seemed that the work that Thomson did for the chief was only a repayment for the land they had acquired. Yet I learned that the family had benefitted in many ways through the ‘repayment’ work Thomson had done for the chief. In 2009, he still had a strong relationship with the chief and was a trusted advisor and reliable spokesperson for the community. This came with many advantages; one example is that when many bridges were washed away in the heavy rains in 2008, the bridge leading to Thomson’s farm was one of the first to be repaired by the men working for the chief.

Figure 4.1 Make-up of Ba and Bana Thomson’s household in 2009

The nuclear family consisted of six people in 2009: Thomson, his wife, and their four daughters (aged 15, 17, 17, and 20 years). Fourteen grandchildren from six other families founded by the couple’s children also lived in the household. Of these 14, five were aged 18, 19, and 20 years, and nine were younger than 18 years (their ages ranged from 10 to 16 years). Of the 14 grandchildren younger than 18 years, 10 were double orphans while four had not been orphaned. These latter four children were no longer with their parents because their parents lived in town and their mother was ill. According to Thomson, of his four daughters
and two sons who had died, one had died of a snakebite, one of malaria, one was murdered, and the other three died of long illnesses. The term long illness is used frequently in Zambia and is a euphemism for HIV/AIDS.

The Thomson farm consisted of a number of buildings located around a single large round house at the centre of the homestead. The houses were round and their arrangement was not of the type typically found in Misangwa. Local villages consist of rectangular houses, and they are not arranged according to a specified pattern. The architecture of the Thompson buildings was based on the building style found in North Western Province, where the couple came from. The smaller structures on the homestead were where the children and grandchildren slept. There was one small open hut, which served as the kitchen and central eating place. There was a large maize storage structure and on the outskirts of the homestead were several makeshift structures that housed the family’s four pigs. On top of one of the anthills close to the main house, Thomson had built a small hut with large chairs. This was his “lookout post”, and it had a good view of the farm and the small river along its southern border. The farm consisted of several large fields and a large garden on the banks of the small river. Several fruit trees – oranges, bananas, papayas, mulberries, and guavas – grew in the compound.

The farm was located far into the bush and it was a two-hour walk to the main road, at least a three-hour walk to the Mission, two-and-a-half-hours to Mfulabunga Basic School, and two hours to Mpongwe. This meant that the children had to walk long distances to school and it was also a problem to take produce from the farm to the Mission or to Mpongwe. When I asked Thompson about this, he explained that the distance had disadvantages as well as advantages:

Yes, it is very difficult. The distances are big. Not only for the children going to school, but also for trading. I remember one time we were selling maize to this trader. We carried 20 bags of maize, each 50 kg, to the road by bicycle. Then the trader did not come. Together with two of my grandsons I spent four nights by the side of the road. You have to guard those bags or they will be stolen. When the trader did not come, there was nothing we could do but bring all those bags back to the house.

But, I can say there are many advantages also. We don’t have theft and farming is much easier when no one comes to steal your food, your tools, or your crops from the field. Here we don’t need security; it is the end of the road, no one comes here. All these problems with drinking, fighting, and gossiping ... we know none of those things at our farm. My daughters are very beautiful and I worry that they will have teenage pregnancies before they complete school. But they tell me: “Daddy don’t worry, we are committed”. I believe them. And that is the other advantage: here there are no young men coming to your house to ask for that or that girl ... A boy won’t even offer to walk the girls’ home, it is too far!

Despite this, the family was able to maintain strong links with the community. As was explained above, they had a good relationship with the chief. Other important relationships existed with the Catholic Priests at the Mission and with Thomson’s customers (he was a skilled mason). Thomson’s wife was a faithful
Catholic who attended mass at Mfulabunga Church twice a week. One of the Priests from St. Anthony’s Mission came to say Mass there every Friday morning. This gave Bana Thomson the chance to build and maintain her relationship with the church and the people at the Mission. She was also an active member of the Catholic Women’s League, a powerful and important group among the social groups formed around the Catholic Church.

The family’s income came from a number of sources. The farm produced an average of 500 bags of maize each year. The family would keep the maize that they needed for their own consumption and sell the rest. In the spring of 2009, for instance, 420 bags of maize were sold. The garden was used to grow onions, which the family sold to the Rural Health Centre at St. Anthony’s Mission and to the boarding school at Mpongwe. Their gardens also produced tomatoes, cabbage, and rape\(^2\). This was for family consumption, but when harvests were good some was sold at the market close to Mfulabunga Basic School. Thomson made extra money as a mason and carpenter, doing odd jobs for the Mission and people in Misangwa. The last time I visited them, Thomson had nearly completed the family’s new house: a “proper” house, he explained, made of burnt bricks, with iron sheet roofing and seven bedrooms to house all the family. In terms of socio-economic ranking, the household qualified as well-off, the best off of the socio-economic rankings defined in Chapter Three.

Thompson and his wife were both in good health and they were active people. Bana Thompson spent most of her day working in the family garden. Her husband joined her unless he had paid work elsewhere. Both walked the long distances to church, the markets, or customers a few times a week. They were optimistic people who had come to Misangwa with a clear plan. They were close with their children and grandchildren, and during every visit it became clear how well the members of the households worked together and how much they enjoyed each other’s company. Despite their problems – old age, the loss of many of their children, the hard work on the fields, and the great distances they had to walk – they had managed to secure an adequate income and were able to provide well for their children and grandchildren. As Thompson put it:

Life has not been easy but we came here to achieve the things that we have achieved. Once I finish my house then my plans will have materialised. The young ones living with me are all in school and when they are not in school they all cooperate to work on the farm with us and run the household. It is so good for us old people to see this harmony. We have been very blessed and for that I thank our Lord!

In contrast to most children and young people in Misangwa, the children living in Ba Thomson’s household were always well dressed. During my visits to

\(^{2}\) Rape is a crop grown in many parts of Africa that is best described as a mix between cabbage and spinach.
their home, they were friendly and asked many questions about the purpose of my visits. They provided a contrast to the other children included in the research, who were often shy and took a long time to become comfortable in their role as respondents. Despite the large number of children and grandchildren in the home, they were all enrolled in school. When I first visited them in 2008, two of the oldest daughters, Helen and Margret, were preparing for their grade 12 examinations. A year later, the older of the two girls, Helen, was studying business administration in Luanshya. She lived with friends whom the family knew through Church, and came home once a month to spend the weekend with her family. Margret had not done very well in her exams and I understood that she was repeating examinations for two subjects in the hope of starting her further studies in 2010. The other 16 children were attending school at Mfulabunga Basic School or Mpongwe Secondary School. Despite the long walks they needed to make to and from school, they all nevertheless participated in the work on the farm and around the house.

Interviews and informal interactions with the couple’s children and grandchildren taught me that they experienced their lives as positive and that they were optimistic about the future. An interview with Mulenga, a 16-year-old double orphan, illustrated how they felt about their guardians and their new lives:

It was a difficult time for me when my parents were sick. My father was sick for a long time and the family was suffering very much. Then after my mum died we were very worried. I used to think I would become a street child and sleep outside. That happens to many orphans. But then my grandmother came to collect me and also my younger brother and sister. We came to this place and found things to be quite okay and I know we will manage. I am in school doing grade 10. One day I hope to be a farmer like my grandmother. I enjoy the work on the farm and I have learnt many things from them [the grandparents]. They are very good people. It is good we share the work.

This household was, strictly speaking, not a skipped-generation household, as some of the children of the two grandparents were still living with them, and therefore there were three generations present. I have included it in this chapter, however, as I argue that it was a skipped-generation household because it had no real middle generation in the true sense of the word, namely because the older couple’s children were not the parents of the younger generation living in the household. The second reason is that all the members of the younger generation were in school and thus all dependent on the elderly couple. None of the children in the home was married, none had established a family or had children of their own, and none was involved in the decision-making processes of the household. Many things were unique about this household. This includes the agricultural skills of Ba and Bana Thomson, but also the close ties they had with important community members. They were able to cultivate large plots of land and were able to diversify their sources of income.
Bana Marjory’s household

In 2009, Bana Marjory was 68-years-old and the guardian of eight grandchildren and one great-grandchild. With much joy she told the story of how, in 1957, she was a young woman who sang in the Church choir. One day the choir travelled to Mukubwe for a singing competition. During that visit she met a young man with whom she fell in love. The love turned out to be mutual and later that year his family travelled to Misangwa to meet her family, and it was decided that the two could marry. He moved to Misangwa, they were married, and they had six children and eventually 22 grandchildren.

Her husband, a fisherman on the Kafue River, died in an accident in 1974. The canoe he was travelling in overturned and he was killed by a crocodile. His body was never found. Marjory explained that not being able to bury her husband had been very difficult for her and that only through time had she been able to accept the situation. Compounding these difficulties was the fact that she later found out that she had been pregnant at the time her husband died. Following the loss of her husband, she had to raise their six children alone, which was not an easy task:

I was still a young woman those days and from doing things together you just find yourself having to raise six children by yourself. It was not easy and I struggled a lot. But I think I have done what I had to do. My children all finished primary school and some even attended secondary school. Sometimes I think the work was for nothing but that is not the way to think. As a parent, you expect your children to attend your funeral, not for you to be there for theirs. It was unfortunate they left this earth too early. I did what I could to save them but sometimes you can’t interfere with the plans of God. Even if His plan is for you not to have money, meaning you can’t take your children to the hospital.

Despite several offers, she decided not to remarry:

A few men came to my house to propose to me but I always declined telling them I was still in mourning. I think I would have liked to remarry but the problem is you never know how the match will be. Will the new man accept your children? Will the children accept their step-father? And then a man will want to have children of his own and I would have had to give him those. But six children was already a lot and I didn’t want more children to feed. So I decided to stay alone and not to marry another man.

Marjory had three sons and three daughters; the oldest child was born in 1963 and her youngest in 1975. In 2009, only one of these children, her third child, Kelvin, was still alive. He was 39-years-old and was a subsistence farmer who lived in a village close to Marjory’s home. He had a wife and four children.

Marjory lost five children in a period of 13 years. Her oldest son, Joseph, died in 1986 when he was 23-years-old. He had an accident with an axe while clearing trees on a new farming plot. The cut went untreated and after a while he became ill from the infection. The infection spread and his condition worsened. Looking back, she concluded that he should have sought medical attention, but ‘there was no money in the family when he had injured himself, so we decided to wait’.
Eventually his foot had to be amputated at Mpongwe Hospital, but “It was too late and the poison from that foot had already reached his body”, Marjory explained. Joseph died and left a wife and four children. Soon after, his wife left Misangwa with their children and returned to her own family, who lived 60 kilometres away. Marjory had not seen or heard from her or her grandchildren since.

In 1990, her oldest daughter Maria died. She had not left her parental homestead but for many years had lived in a separate household. She never married, but did have a young daughter who was left in Marjory’s care after her death. Marjory was secretive about Maria’s death and refused to discuss it. People in Misangwa rumoured that she had committed suicide after the baby’s birth. According to the rumours, she was heartbroken because the father of the child had abandoned her. All Marjory said about what had happened was that it was unfortunate. The granddaughter, also called Maria, who was raised by Marjory, had a son of her own, called Vebon, in April 2008.

A second daughter, Eliza, died in 1992 following a long sickness during which she was bedridden. Marjory explained that Eliza had lost her husband only months before she became sick.

She became very thin and could not eat often. We cared for her but there was nothing we could do. I know she died of that disease [AIDS].

She came home to Marjory when she first fell ill and Marjory was her primary caregiver until her death. She left four children who remained with Marjory. These children were still present in 2009; two boys – Ton aged 18 and Ayrton aged 14 years – and two girls – Vanessa aged 17 and Marjory aged 15 years.

In 1995, Marjory’s youngest son, Maxwell, died aged 22 years. He had been in poor health for a long time. He was married and had two children. When Maxwell was admitted to the Rural Health Centre at St. Anthony’s Mission, his wife and children left Misangwa. Marjory explained that her son often lost blood when he went to the toilet and he had a problem with his intestines. The medical staff could do little for him and he was transferred to Mpongwe hospital, where he died two days later. As with the death of her other son Joseph, she had never heard from the widowed daughter-in-law or from the grandchildren again.

The last death of one of her children occurred in 1999. Her daughter Kondwani and her three children had lived with Marjory for some years following her divorce. She died after a long period of sickness. Marjory suspected her death to be AIDS-related. During the final months of her life, Marjory had been her daughter’s primary caregiver. She fed, bathed, and cared for her before she eventually died at home in Marjory’s arms. Marjory and her brothers had decided that the three children would remain with her, as no one in the family was in a better position to look after them. The three still lived with Marjory in 2009: the
oldest girl, Roice, was 15-years-old and the two boys, Thomas and Mike, were aged 13 and 11 years.

**Figure 4.2** Family tree of Bana Marjory’s household

The family lived in a small homestead that consisted of two small houses made of sundried bricks, an open nsaka³ used for cooking, a small elevated chicken house, a grass structure for maize storage, and several fruit trees including bananas and guavas. There was also a dilapidated building in the homestead where her daughter had once lived. Her farm was located along a small road that led from the Mission to the small pontoon crossing the Kafue River. The soil in this area was very fertile and several commercial farmers had established farms in this area. In fact, Marjory had been approached more than once by commercial farmers seeking to buy her land. She had indeed sold part of her land to a South African farmer:

> He came to visit all the farms to ask if we wanted to sell land. I had a small plot some kilometres away from our home, which I never used – it was too far – so I decided to sell that land. It gave us a little something that we used to buy the chickens that you can still see today.

³ Nsaka is the local name for a house built with poles (sometimes, but not always, with walls) and a circular thatched roof.
She still owned three hectares of land close to the homestead. About half of it had been cleared and was available for farming. The rest was covered with trees and shrubs and it was obvious that this land had not been used for many years. When Marjory and her husband acquired this land they did not know many people. Both of their families lived in Chief Machiya’s lands, which are located some 50 kilometres away from Misangwa. Over the years, she had come to know her neighbours and others in the vicinity of her home:

I came here as a stranger but I have come to know the people here. These days I don’t meet them often anymore, I am an old woman ... Old people prefer to stay close to their home because we move too slowly.

In spite of the fact that her frail body limited her mobility, Marjory was able to name a number of people with whom she had contact on a regular basis. According to her, the most important people in her network were her neighbours, her son who lived less than two kilometres away, a number of friends she had had from the time she was still an active member of the church, and some other acquaintances. She explained that during the last five years she had found it increasingly difficult to walk to church (approximately eight kilometres away). In 2007, she had decided that it was simply too much and she stopped going. She was happy that some of her grandchildren attended church, and they were able to tell her friends and the Pastor how she was doing. The Pastor visited her occasionally to have a chat. This was important for her and she often said how grateful she was for his commitment to her. She also had some elderly relatives in the area, including two brothers. They were also old and immobile, so the siblings did not see each other regularly. She explained that they exchanged news and messages via the grandchildren.

In terms of income, Marjory described the households ‘struggling’ but ‘managing’; two phrases that are understood to mean ‘working hard’ and ‘coping’ in the Zambian context. The most important source of both food and income was maize. Besides maize, they also grew some groundnuts, which are rich in oil and a high value cash crop. In 2008, they sold 200 bags of maize and 10 bags of groundnuts. Around their homestead, they had cassava plants, which provided food in the months when the maize supplies ran out. The family also had several fruit trees and they were able to sell fruit, mostly bananas, to supplement their income. The oldest granddaughter, Maria, ran a small business. She travelled to Luanshya every two months to buy sweets, sugar, salt, and packets of cane spirit in bulk. Back in Misangwa, she sold these items in small quantities at a stall she owned close to one of the busier paths near their house. This brought in some money, but, according to Maria:

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A cash crop is an agricultural crop which is grown for sale for profit; the term is used to differentiate marketed crops from subsistence crops.
There is only business in the months when the people have money. Especially after the harvest people buy a lot of sweets and Tujilijili. There is no business from November and only in April, when people have sold their maize, do they start buying again.

As the family lived close to the Kafue River, the grandsons did some fishing. Most of the time, the catch would be eaten by the household members, but when they were lucky some fish could be sold to fishermen and fish traders. In terms of socio-economic ranking, the household qualified as the middle category of ‘poor’.

In 2008, Marjory was, despite her limited mobility, in good health. She was able to work on the farm and often when I visited she would be away collecting water, firewood, or bush foods. She did have some problems with her sight and it was clear that she needed both spectacles and a cataract operation. During her life Marjory faced many misfortunes, as did most heads of skipped-generation households, and the impacts of adversity were frequently far-reaching. The death of her husband, having to raise her children alone, the deaths of five of her six children, and later the unsupported guardianship of some of her grandchildren had caused pain and suffering for her. She talked about this on several occasions, but always expressed her happiness about her life, and she considered herself rich to be surrounded by so many caring and loving grandchildren. The members of the household worked hard together and tried to make the best of their difficult circumstances. Her way of dealing with the hardships in her life is captured in the following comment she made:

Yes, it is tough for a person. To lose your husband is tough. To lose almost all of your children is tough. To care for your own child when she is slowly dying, even dying in your arms, is very, very difficult. And sometimes you will think to yourself “Is there never an end to all these problems?” But, then I find myself surrounded by these young ones who need me but who also care for me, their old grandmother. They try and together we have managed to at least have some food every day. Sometimes we have problems in the home but then I realise I am just an old woman, my time has passed, and that now it is their time. So I accept and just go about my normal jobs. They can decide how to do things now; they have shown me they are able to make those choices.

The grandchildren living with Marjory appeared healthy. Of the nine children, four were in school. Vebon, who was Marjory’s great-grandson, was too young to go to school. Three grandsons (aged 11, 13, and 15 years) and one of the granddaughters (aged 15 years) went to a Community School close to the waterworks. The school offered education up to grade eight. The older grandchildren had also attended this school and three of the four had left with a grade eight diploma. The problem in terms of secondary education, aside from the financial constraints, was that the closest secondary school was in Mpongwe, over 30 kilometres away. This distance was too great and the family could not afford to

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5 Tujilijili is the local name for cane spirit or other distilled alcohol, packaged in small plastic sachets.
pay for the costs associated with boarding and transport. Thus the children had no way of attaining secondary education, which they said had been disappointing for them. One of the grandsons, Ayton, aged 14 years, explained:

You know, sometimes there is nothing that you can do to change a situation. I would have liked to go to grade nine but the school is far away. And we are poor people ... If we had another bicycle, or enough money to rent a small house close to the school, then maybe ... yes I could attend. Now that is not how it is, so I work hard to develop and further the household. Maybe one day my own children can attend secondary school. That is what I want to work towards.

The oldest grandson, Ton, aged 17 years, explained to me that he had needed to adjust his goals but that he felt he had done so successfully:

I used to do well in school. In grades five and six I was the pupil with the highest grades of all my class! My teachers used to tell me I would be able to achieve many things. Like being a teacher, or a doctor or even a president! Haha, imagine me being the president! But for many years I thought I would be going to the secondary school, and then maybe to go to town and be a doctor. When I was older I started to understand that we are poor people and that those things are not for us. Now I have decided to remain here and take over this farm from my grandmother. There are many commercial farmers here. I plan to work for them and learn how to make a lot of money through farming.

The material needs of the grandchildren were mostly met. They had blankets to sleep under, they all had several items of clothing, most of them had one pair of shoes, and the family ate two or sometimes three meals per day. They had a radio that the boys used to listen to football matches, the girls used for music, and Marjory used for news and local programmes. They also owned a bicycle that the grandchildren used to cycle around Misangwa to visit friends or run errands. In 2009, Royce, the oldest granddaughter, had bought a mobile phone. This increased her status in the home as other members wanted to use her phone.

The household’s agricultural output was not large, but it was sufficient for the family’s needs, both in terms of money and food. The household members told me that over the last few years their food storage ran dry only twice. The household was found to be slightly better off than the majority of skipped-generation households. Yet, it was no more than average compared to the general population. In terms of education, it was also average. Conflicts in the household were few and relations with neighbours and others were positive. Overall, life in this household was slightly better than in most skipped-generation households.

Discussion

The three cases described in this chapter point to common features of skipped-generation households that will be analysed in order to gain a better understanding of the dynamics at play. At the same time, the cases highlight that there are differences between these households and the people constituting them. The
study of these differences will help to understand the observed variations in socio-economic status, the well-being of the household members, and in terms of the outcomes of child development between the skipped-generation households. This will be done in the following three chapters.

Several common features that were found within skipped-generation households deserve close study. One of these is the troubled pasts of the respondents. Both the older and younger generations have seen difficult times; they have cared for terminally ill loved ones and have lost many of them. Following the death of relatives, they have all had to assume new roles in their lives. The first question to be addressed in the following chapters is therefore: What are the past experiences of the respondents? This will be answered through the construction of respondents’ life histories. The question that follows from this is: How have people’s past experiences shaped their attitudes? This question will be answered using Bronfenbrenner’s typologies of person characteristics, as well as the reported well-being of respondents.

Other common features of these households that were found to be important were livelihood strategies, the geographic location of households, and the interactions of members of the two generations with people around them. Chapter Five thus focuses on the livelihood strategies, and indeed livelihood outcomes, of the 65 skipped-generation households studied. This chapter also examines the geographic spread of households and the linkages between problems, outcomes, and geographic location. In Chapters Six and Seven, much attention is devoted to the respondents’ social context. Using Bronfenbrenner’s PPCT model, this contextual analysis will be carried out within the framework of microsystems and mesosystems. This will be done for members of both the older and the younger generations. Using this methodology, two questions will be answered: Who are the important people in the respondents’ environments? And what are the outcomes of these interactions and what are important proximal processes that shape the development of the members of the younger generation?

While attention is given to the common features of skipped-generation households in the following chapters, the differences between households will also be explored. The three cases described in this chapter demonstrate several such differences. Differences in knowledge (Ba Thomson’s extensive skills in agriculture versus Marjory’s traditional farming style) and differences in attitude (Marjory’s positive outlook versus Ebenah’s fatalism) are two examples. These differences may explain the varying levels of success of these households in terms of caring for their members and facilitating successful child development. The question that needs to be answered in order to assess this is: How do people’s skills, knowledge, attitude, and experience influence their material, physical, and social well-being? Building on this, the following three chapters will also examine the
question: Which aspects of people’s knowledge are most important for them to secure a livelihood and improve the well-being of all household members?

The relationship between the older and younger generation is an important avenue of difference that will also be explored further. In the second and third cases presented above, I described households where members worked together and did their best to develop together. In the first case, however, the younger generation had decided to go their own way as a strategy to cope with the problematic drinking and controlling character of their grandmother. Are there clear relationships between cooperation, or the lack thereof, and the socio-economic and personal well-being of the household members? Another possible explanation for differing well-being outcomes between households are the numerous potential sources of conflict, including high levels of poverty and inter-generational gaps, which may or may not be mitigated or avoided. Expectations, attitudes, inter-generational conflicts, and disappointment are all issues that will be explored to identify different outcomes among these households. Chapters Six and Seven will explore these issues and will thereby answer the question: What are important sources of conflict in these households and what are the most effective ways that respondents use to avoid these conflicts or mitigate their effects?