



Impact Snapshot

The Zimbabwe Integrated Community Development Program

Repeated droughts, floods and unpredictable rainfall have devastated agricultural production in Zimbabwe, resulting in widespread food insecurity and loss of livelihoods. In 2023–24, only 40% of crops were harvested. The following season, erratic rainfall and high temperatures caused further losses and six million people, including 1.7 million children, faced significant food insecurity and hunger during the lean season.

Gokwe South, Gutu and Hwange Districts were significantly affected. Families faced hunger and malnutrition and women and children spent long hours collecting water from distant and often unsafe sources. Agricultural activities Livestock and horticulture activities were severely impacted, reducing incomes and access to nutritious food.

The Zimbabwe Integrated Community Development Program responded to these urgent needs by partnering with communities to identify priorities, mobilise resources and lead solutions that strengthened their wellbeing and resilience.

Relevance

The program aligned closely with national climate and development policies and directly addressed what communities said they needed most: food, water, income opportunities and safer environments for women and children. Using the Assets- Based Community Development approach meant communities led the process, forming water point committees, garden groups and savings clubs that they continue to manage themselves.

At A Glance

Country: Zimbabwe

Duration: July 2022 - June 2025

Sectors:



Water & Sanitation



Food & Nutrition Security



Livelihoods



Gender Equality



Child Production



Climate Resilience

Total Reach: 96,185 people including 25,173 females, 20,979 children and 1,086 people with disabilities.



Project Interventions and Impact

Implemented in 12 villages, the Zimbabwe Integrated Community Development Program adopted a strengths-based approach called Asset-Based Community Development, with communities leading and driving the process.

Food Security, Nutrition and Livelihoods

The program aimed to enhance food security, nutrition, and income for 9,025 people by establishing community gardens, training farmers in conservation agriculture and distributing essential farming inputs.

These initiatives allowed households to grow grains and vegetables, reducing hunger and malnutrition. To boost incomes, farmers were also encouraged to sell produce and form savings and lending schemes. Additional income-generating activities included piggery, goat rearing, fish farming, and poultry projects. The program also refurbished dip tanks to prevent livestock diseases and protect existing livestock assets.

Severe and repeated droughts limited the ability of beneficiaries to fully increase crop yields and profitability, particularly for maize and small grains. Participants, however, gained valuable skills in climatesmart agriculture, which they are likely to apply in the next season with expected better rainfall. Department of Agricultural, Technical and Extension Services officers reported positive environmental effects from the Program's conservation agriculture, including improved soil health, better water management, increased biodiversity and reduced soil erosion. Community gardens improved access to fresh vegetables while fostering community engagement and cohesion. Households benefited from additional income, which was used for school fees, groceries and corn meal. These outcomes were supported by program-provided fences, boreholes, seeds and training in good farming practices.



KEY IMPACTS



Income growth:

Most households increased their income from under USD 20 to USD 51-300 per month, with additional earnings used for school fees and groceries.



Increased food availability

and access: Over 14,000 people improved food security through conservation agriculture, livestock and community gardens, with more households able to eat three meals a day despite severe drought.



Environmental benefits:

include reduced soil tillage, improved soil health, better water management and enhanced biodiversity, all contributing to climate change mitigation.



Increased climate resilience:

Farmers gained climate-smart farming and conservation agriculture skills, enhancing resilience against climate shocks.

Safe Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

The project aimed to enhance access to clean water and sanitation for 19,859 people by restoring or installing solar-powered boreholes, ensuring reliable water supply during droughts. This initiative sought to reduce the distance women and children travel for water, improve school sanitation, and decrease waterborne diseases. Additionally, small dams were built or rehabilitated for agricultural support, and latrines were constructed along with hygiene education sessions.

Findings indicate a significant decrease in waterborne diseases like cholera and diarrhea among beneficiaries. Communities now access clean water from solar-powered boreholes and rehabilitated water points, replacing unsafe sources.

This improvement, along with better hygiene knowledge and toilet construction, has enhanced sanitation and reduced disease exposure.



KEY IMPACTS



Increased water access:

28,066 people gained access to safe, clean water within 2 kms of their home, reducing travel by up to 5 kms.



Improved health:

Cholera and diarrhoea rates decreased in Gokwe South from 37% to 21% and from 36% to 26% in Gutu.



Time savings & improved safety:

Women and children reduced water collection time to 40 minutes from 4 hours, decreasing exposure and risk of violence during the trip.

Child Protection

To protect 7,295 children and create a safe environment across the 12 villages training on child rights, child abuse prevention and national case management was delivered to children, community members, child protection committees and local leaders. The Department of Social Development, Zimbabwe Republic Police, social workers and childcare workers were engaged to strengthen community awareness and support systems for identifying and responding to child abuse cases.

The program contributed to safer communities for children by reducing cases of child abuse, neglect, and child marriages across target areas. Communities reported increased confidence in identifying and reporting suspected child abuse, helping to improve overall child safety and wellbeing.



KEY IMPACTS



Improved child safety:

Awareness of children's rights and reporting mechanisms rose among 86% of respondents.



Child marriage rates decreased from 18.2% to 4.9– 8% as a result of program activities.



Stronger links with government child welfare services and relevant authorities, improved reporting, tracing and response to child abuse.





Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

To develop a positive culture that recognises the complementary gender roles of women and men for 6,687 people the project conducted training for women, supported their participation in community leadership roles in garden committees, water committees, child protection committees and internal savings and lending schemes committees and facilitated women's savings and lending groups. It delivered gender-based violence awareness sessions to challenge harmful norms and encourage advocacy for women's rights.

Women's decision-making power in community structures such as savings groups, health committees and village or ward governance bodies improved. Communities reported shifts in attitudes on gender roles, recognising women's capacity to participate in decision-making and leadership. These changes increased women's voices on issues affecting their lives, allowed them to contribute to community governance and influence household decisions.

Participants reported increased confidence to advocate for their rights and engage fully in social, economic and civic life.



KEY IMPACTS



Increased leadership, participation and decision making: 1,045

women took on roles in community committees, empowering their voices in key household and community decisions.



Economic empowerment: 926

women started or expanded small businesses through skills training and savings and lending groups, enhancing their financial independence and household decision-making.



Reduced gender violence: Domestic violence rates fell to 6.7–8.9% (from 21.3%) supported by improved gender norms and women's increased confidence in advocating for their rights and seeking support.



Sustainability

The program is well placed to continue delivering benefits to the community. Local government will keep providing technical support in agriculture, livestock health, women's affairs and rural infrastructure, so communities can continue building on what they have learned. Communities are also set up to sustain the efforts. Garden and water committees are collecting small fees to maintain boreholes, gardens and other shared assets, while savings groups will use part of their funds for repairs and future infrastructure investments. Households are growing crops and raising livestock, providing food and income that motivate them to keep their gardens and small enterprises going. Conservation agriculture and safer locations for gardens and water points will continue to protect soil, water and local ecosystems. The program has established strong social foundations: community-led committees are overseeing key activities, while community members have developed practical skills and knowledge across farming, water and hygiene, inclusion and child protection. These capabilities and governance structures are strengthening community confidence and ownership, positioning them to sustain progress and drive their own development well into the future.

Recommendations:

- 1 Scale-up interventions to nearby villages due to need and impact of the project.
- 2 Success was driven by communities taking the lead. Continuing this strengths-based model, where communities drive their own development will support self-reliance.
- 3 Continue using cost-effective borehole drilling methods which pays only for boreholes that produce water.
- 4 Integrate a focused value chain and market linkage component for crops and livestock to help producers organise, advocate for their interests and access markets.
- 5 Expand climate-smart agriculture to address recurring drought. More training, tools and drought-tolerant crops will support farmers to grow enough food even in seasons with extreme water shortages.
- 6 Government departments played key roles in agriculture training, child protection and gender equality interventions. Strengthening such partnerships will improve quality, ensure consistency and support sustainability.
- 7 The program made strong progress in women's leadership and participation. Ongoing support for women's groups, inclusive community structures and decisionmaking will ensure everyone has a voice and more equity in home and community life.
- 8 A stronger system to track progress, gather community feedback and respond to emerging needs will help the program adapt quickly, especially during climate shocks and demonstrate results to donors and partners.
- 9 Communities made important gains in keeping children safe. Ongoing training and stronger links with child welfare services, schools and local committees will help protect children as economic and climate pressures continue.

This Impact Snapshot summarises results from the final evaluation of the Zimbabwe Integrated Community Development Program, implemented by Caritas Gweru, Caritas Gokwe, and Caritas Hwange, supported by Caritas Australia and by the Australian Government through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP). The Evaluation was conducted by an independent consultancy.