

Impact Snapshot

Zimbabwe Integrated Community Development Program

Zimbabwe's rural communities have faced persistent poverty, food insecurity and limited access to essential services, with recurring droughts, climate variability and economic pressures placing increasing strain on households. These pressures have been particularly challenging for vulnerable households, with women, children and people with disabilities facing greater barriers to accessing resources, services and opportunities. Against this backdrop, Zimbabwe's Gokwe, Hwange and Gweru Districts experience significant development needs, with communities identifying safe water, food production, nutrition, livestock and income as key priorities. Poor access to water and sanitation, limited livelihood opportunities and economic hardship have also contributed to wider health, protection and gender-related challenges.

The Zimbabwe Integrated Community Development Program was designed to respond to these urgent needs adopting an integrated, community-led approach. Communities themselves identified priorities and contributed their labour, knowledge and local resources to the Program, with Caritas, traditional leaders and government technical services providing support. At the same time as addressing immediate needs the approach also aimed to strengthen local capacity and ownership to sustain solutions and impact over time.

Relevance

The design responded directly to district level needs assessments, including a 2018 gender, disability and child protection audit and poverty assessments showing poverty up to 82% in Matabeleland North and 63% in parts of Chivi district. The program was closely aligned with community priorities and district development needs, particularly around water, food security, sanitation, livelihoods and protection. Communities were at the centre of planning and implementation, while government extension services, traditional leaders and local authorities provided technical support and helped connect community-led action with government systems.

At A Glance

Country: Zimbabwe

Duration: July 2019 - June 2022

Sectors:

- **Water & Sanitation**
- **Food & Nutrition Security**
- **Livelihoods**
- **Gender Equality**
- **Child Protection**
- **Disability Inclusion**

Total Reach: 48,216 people, including vulnerable and marginalised people, children, women, older people and people living with disabilities

Funding/Donor: Australian Government, through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP), and Caritas Australia



Project Interventions and Impact

The program tested an integrated, community-led approach across 12 communities, combining practical investments in livelihoods, water and sanitation, child protection, gender equality and disability inclusion. The evaluation found that communities particularly valued this combination because it produced visible and tangible improvements in everyday life. The design process was community led with asset-based community development trainings reached over 230 people across Gweru's four villages alone, alongside similar community mapping exercises in Gokwe and Hwange.

Food Security, Nutrition and Livelihoods

Vulnerable households were supported through conservation farming, nutrition gardens, small livestock, income-generating activities and Internal Savings and Lending Schemes (ISALs), alongside training in financial management, business skills and market linkages. The evaluation found that these interventions strengthened household livelihoods and food security, with ISALs emerging as a success particularly for women. Women's participation encouraged greater involvement by men, strengthening cooperation around household economic roles. Some livestock and poultry activities, however faced challenges linked to local environmental and market conditions.

KEY FINDINGS

- ISALs emerged as a strong success for women and encouraged increased participation by men.
- Community projects strengthened households' capacity to improve food security and livelihoods. For example, in Gokwe, garden produce reached local retail outlets, including the Masunda project, which supplied vegetables to a Spar supermarket in Gokwe town.
- Livelihood benefits extended beyond some immediate target villages.
- Training and practical skills strengthened communities' ability to continue farming and income-generating activities.
- A combined 44 nutrition gardens were established across the three districts (16 in Gokwe, 16 in Gweru and 12 in Hwange).



Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

Caritas invested in water systems, sanitation infrastructure and hygiene promotion, including solarising existing boreholes, installing piped water and taps, training water committees and pump minders, and constructing household and school toilets. The evaluation found improved access to safe water and sanitation and highlighted solar-powered systems as an important innovation, reducing the labour required to collect water and improving accessibility for people with disabilities.

KEY FINDINGS

Combined, the three projects drilled or rehabilitated 49 boreholes across Gokwe, Gweru and Hwange (7, 18 and 24 respectively).

200 household toilets were constructed in Hwange, improving sanitation, privacy and dignity.

Solar-powered water systems were installed across all three districts, improving access while reducing the labour required to collect water. For example, In Gokwe, a solar powered borehole replaced a walk of almost an hour to the nearest water source, with one community elder noting water was now available about 500 metres away.

Piped water and taps improved accessibility for people with disabilities.

Water and sanitation improvements saved time and reduced safety risks associated with collecting water.

Rehabilitation of the Mpumelelo dam in Hwange restored year round water for 1,168 people, after the dam had previously dried up five months before each rainy season.



Child Protection and Safer Communities

The program strengthened child protection through training and awareness for children, parents, traditional leaders and community members, including action on child marriage and teenage pregnancy. School-based child protection committees were established, while partnerships with government and police helped strengthen responses to abuse and gender-based violence. The evaluation found increased protection of children in schools and reports of reduced child marriage in targeted communities, with practical support helping address some vulnerabilities facing girls. Operation Disturb the Night was developed, a rapid response model in which village heads, community child care workers and the police Victim Friendly Unit intervened at night to remove girls from child marriages, with some perpetrators subsequently jailed.

KEY FINDINGS

- Child protection was strengthened in schools through school-based child protection committees.
- Communities reported reductions in child marriage in targeted areas.
- Traditional leaders became more actively engaged in child protection and gender issues.
- Practical support complemented awareness raising to address vulnerabilities affecting girls.
- Child protection training reached hundreds of children directly, including 532 children in Hwange and 349 children in Gweru.

KEY FINDINGS

- Accessible water infrastructure increased access to water for people with disabilities.
- Traditional leaders became more engaged in advancing women's rights, child protection and disability inclusion.
- Increased participation of women and marginalised people in community decision-making. In Hwange, for example, women chaired almost all water point committees and held an estimated 70% of leadership positions across project structures; in Gweru, women made up 163 of 219 members (74% of water, garden and savings group committees.

Gender Equality and Disability Inclusion

Gender equality was integrated across the program through training for women, men and traditional leaders on GBV, leadership and gender norms. The program strengthened women's control over resources and participation in decision-making, while disability inclusion was incorporated into community activities and infrastructure. The evaluation found positive changes in how traditional leaders and other stakeholders engaged with women, children and people with disabilities, while women participating in ISALs strengthened their economic participation. Women participating in ISALs became a visible success story, prompting increased participation by men.





Sustainability

The program invested in community ownership, practical skills and local structures to help sustain benefits beyond Caritas' exit. Communities were engaged from the outset, while Project Coordinating Committees, Water Committees, pump minders and local leaders played important roles in managing infrastructure and activities. Government line ministries and extension services were also engaged throughout implementation, helping to embed activities within existing local systems. The evaluation found a strong foundation for continued community management, while also highlighting opportunities to further strengthen sustainability. In Gweru and Gokwe, for example, discussions around ownership of hand pump equipment following solarisation demonstrated the importance of clarifying responsibilities for infrastructure management and maintenance. In Hwange, some communities continued to look to Caritas for support, reinforcing the value of clear exit arrangements and continued capacity building. Together, these lessons point to practical measures that can strengthen local ownership and help communities maintain program benefits over the longer term.

Important Evidance Note

The consolidated evaluation noted that some indicator data was reported by implementing partners and could not be independently verified during field visits. This snapshot therefore prioritises evaluation findings, observed outputs and qualitative evidence where possible, rather than presenting unverified figures as precise measures of impact.

Recommendations:

1. Build on the integrated community model, combining livelihoods, essential services and protection around priorities identified by communities.
2. Continue intensive engagement in selected communities while clearly defining who will benefit from shared infrastructure.
3. Strengthen community ownership from the outset, including clear agreements on who will own, operate and maintain infrastructure after Caritas exits.
4. Invest early in technical skills and maintenance, particularly for solar-powered water systems and other community assets.
5. Build on successful women's economic empowerment approaches, particularly ISALs.
6. Link child protection awareness with practical support that addresses vulnerabilities contributing to child marriage and other risks for girls.
7. Strengthen climate resilience in livelihoods programming by adapting agricultural and livestock interventions to local conditions.
8. Design specific pathways for youth participation, as evaluators in all three districts found young people were the least engaged group, often participating only through parents or dropping out due to migration.
9. Strengthen transport and market linkage planning for perishable produce, following reports in both Gokwe and Gweru of vegetable yields spoiling or losing quality before reaching buyers.

This Impact Snapshot summarises results from the final consolidated evaluation of the Zimbabwe Integrated Community Development Program, implemented by Caritas Gweru, Caritas Hwange, and Caritas Gokwe, and supported by Caritas Australia and the Australian Government through the Australian NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP). The evaluation was conducted by an independent consultancy in FY22.

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