

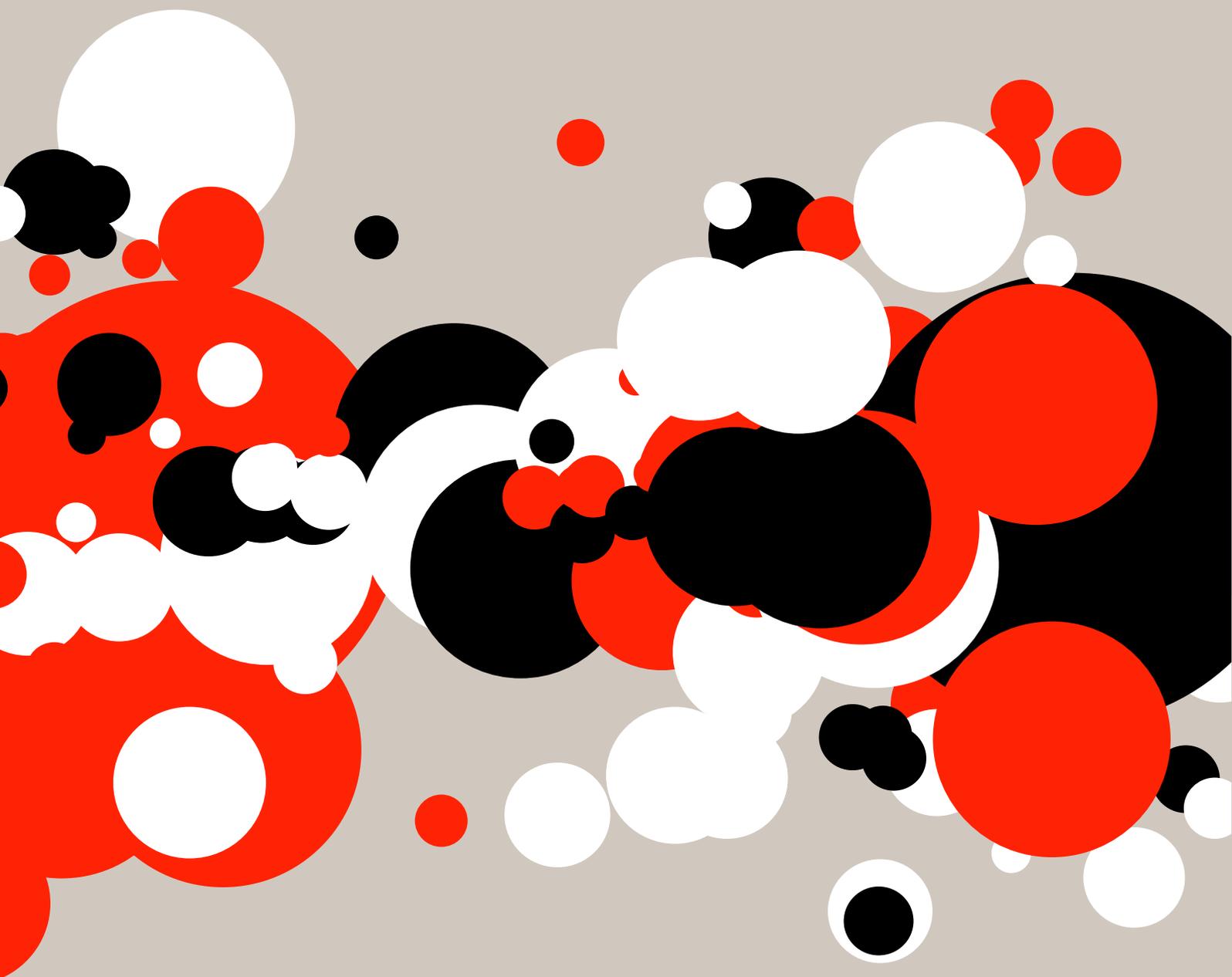


Research Report:

# **Strengths-based approaches in Malawi and Zimbabwe**

Prepared for: Caritas Australia

Institute for Sustainable Futures



## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**The Institute for Sustainable Futures (ISF)** was established by the University of Technology, Sydney in 1996 to work with industry, government and the community to develop sustainable futures through research and consultancy. Our mission is to create change toward sustainable futures that protect and enhance the environment, human wellbeing and social equity. For further information visit: [www.isf.uts.edu.au](http://www.isf.uts.edu.au)

ISF research team: Dr. Keren Winterford and Ian Cunningham

## CITATION

Please cite as: Winterford K., Cunningham, I. 2017. *Strengths-based approaches in Malawi and Zimbabwe*. Prepared for Caritas Australia by the Institute for Sustainable Futures, University of Technology Sydney.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research would not have been possible without the invaluable support of Caritas Australia, CADECOM<sup>1</sup> Malawi, Caritas Gokwe and Caritas Hwange. We would like to thank all staff who participated in the research and supported preparation of the research design, fieldwork, and consultations. We also thank the people of Rumphu and Dowa communities in Malawi, and Gokwe and Hwange communities in Zimbabwe who were incredibly generous with their time and we are grateful for their participation and valuable insights and learning they have provided about SBAs.

This publication, and the projects researched within it, have been funded by the Australian Government through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, via the Australian NGO<sup>2</sup> Cooperation Program (ANCP) and the Australia Africa Community Engagement Scheme (AACES). The views expressed in this publication are the author's alone and are not necessarily the views of the Australian Government.

### INSTITUTE FOR SUSTAINABLE FUTURES

University of Technology, Sydney PO Box 123, Broadway, NSW, 2007  
[www.isf.edu.au](http://www.isf.edu.au) © UTS October 2017

---

<sup>1</sup> CADECOM: Catholic Development Commission in Malawi

<sup>2</sup> NGO: Non-Government Organisation



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

---

<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>	<b>VI</b>
--------------------------	-----------

---

<b>1 BACKGROUND</b>	<b>1</b>
---------------------	----------

---

<b>2 RESEARCH APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY</b>	<b>1</b>
2.1 Purpose	1
2.2 Research questions	1
2.3 Research methodology and methods	2
2.4 Research location and participants	2
2.5 Research limitations	3

---

<b>3 FINDINGS</b>	<b>4</b>
3.1 Localised practice of SBAs	4
3.1.1 Similar SBA process across research locations	5
3.1.2 Support for community visions	7
3.1.3 Annual planning and implementation cycles	8
3.1.4 Local accountability through shared M&E and reporting	8
3.1.5 Use of metaphors	8
3.1.6 Innovative use of rights-based approach with SBAs	9
3.2 Factors supporting SBAs	9
3.2.1 SBA training supported by monitoring	10
3.2.2 Leadership	10
3.2.3 CADECOM / Caritas Gokwe and Hwange as a broker rather than an implementer	12
3.2.4 Flexibility by design allowed support of community aspirations	12
3.2.5 Alignment of vision, goals and implementation with community, CADECOM / Caritas Gokwe and Hwange staff and government	13
3.2.6 Action planning informed decisions on co-contributions from each stakeholder	14
3.2.7 Utilising existing government structures, government champions and positive relationships	14
3.2.8 Local resources and community contribution	15
3.2.9 Relevant skills training which supported action	15
3.3 Dimensions of change	15
3.3.1 Changes experienced by community	17
3.3.2 Changes experienced by CADECOM / Caritas Gokwe and Hwange	20
3.3.3 Changes experienced by government	23
3.3.4 Change beyond project boundaries	25
3.4 Comparison of different development approaches	27
3.4.1 Differences in practice	27
3.4.2 Differences in change	29

---

<b>4 LESSONS LEARNED / RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	<b>31</b>
<hr/>	
<b>5 CONCLUSIONS</b>	<b>32</b>
<hr/>	
<b>6 REFERENCES</b>	<b>33</b>
<hr/>	
<b>APPENDIX A : ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK</b>	<b>34</b>
<hr/>	
<b>APPENDIX B : DE-IDENTIFIED PARTICIPANTS AND ACTIVITIES</b>	<b>35</b>

# Executive summary

## Background

Caritas Australia (CA) started to use Strengths-Based Approaches (SBAs) in Africa in 2011 within the Australia Africa Community Engagement Scheme (AACES) program in Malawi and Tanzania. This 5-year program demonstrated strong results and various external reviews positively evaluated the program. Since 2011, the Africa and Latin America (ALA) group in CA have gradually incorporated SBAs across African projects including continuing use in Malawi and in Zimbabwe since 2015. The use of SBAs is critical to the ALA strategy and has increasingly influenced the work of CA in other regions. In the ALA Regional Plan (2015-18) one of the key outcome areas is:

*'By 2018 all ALA Programs have a deep integration of a SBA/ABCD<sup>3</sup> and can demonstrate how this approach is different from previous approaches'*

As SBAs are central to the development approach of CA, it was deemed necessary to critically appraise the adoption of the approach. This research seeks to respond to this need. The Institute for Sustainable Futures University of Technology Sydney (ISF) was commissioned to carry out the research.

## Research purpose

This research analyses the impact of strength-based approaches (SBAs) in select CA projects in Malawi and Zimbabwe. It seeks to provide insights for CA about the practice and outcomes of SBAs to improve future CA programs. Research questions have been used to frame inquiry on:

1. The localised practice of SBAs including innovation of SBAs in the selected projects;
2. The factors / conditions that support implementation of SBAs and changes resulting;
3. The dimensions<sup>4</sup> of change experienced by different stakeholders as a result of SBAs; and
4. Differences in experience and change resulting from SBAs compared to other development approaches.

Informed by research findings, the research offers recommendations to inform ongoing implementation of SBAs.

## Research approach

An analytical framework was prepared by ISF to frame the research inquiry. The framework was informed by the research purpose and questions. The research methods used were: literature review; key informant interviews; focus group discussions; and data analysis. Fieldwork was completed from 22 May to 3 June 2017. The research was completed in four project sites in two countries: Malawi (Rumphi and Dowa) and Zimbabwe (Gokwe and Hwange) with representatives of key stakeholder groups including: community representatives; CADECOM, Caritas Gokwe and Caritas Hwange staff; government representatives and follow-up interviews with Caritas Australia staff in Australia in September 2017.

## Research findings

Summary of findings in response to the areas of inquiry are noted below. Further details are provided in the body of the report.

### ***Localised practice of SBAs:***

The research found similar SBA processes across all research sites. Key aspects of the practice included:

---

<sup>3</sup> ABCD, asset based community-driven development

<sup>4</sup> Dimensions of change are defined: attitudinal; relational; tangible and other

- CADECOM / Caritas Gokwe and Hwange staff and government provide support for community visions
- Annual planning and implementation cycles
- Local accountability through shared monitoring and evaluation (M&E) and reporting
- Use of metaphors
- Innovative use of rights-based approaches.

### ***Factors supporting SBAs:***

The research found a variety of factors that supported SBAs:

- SBA training supported by monitoring
- Leadership
- CADECOM / Caritas Gokwe and Hwange as a broker rather than implementer
- Flexibility by design allowed support of community aspirations
- Alignment of vision, goals and implementation with community, CADECOM / Caritas Gokwe and Hwange staff and government
- Action planning informed decisions on co-contributions from each stakeholder
- Utilising existing government structures, government champions and positive relationships
- Local resources and community contribution
- Relevant skills training which supported action.

### ***Dimensions of change:***

The research found a variety of changes resulting from SBAs. Changes described by key stakeholders have been categorised using a well-being framework defining attitudinal, relational and tangible dimensions of change.

Key changes across all stakeholder groups included changes in attitude towards self in relation to others; internalisation of a SBA worldview; and changing attitudes of ownership by communities.

The research revealed changing sets of relationships between community, CADECOM / Caritas Gokwe and Hwange, and government staff and also changing relationships within community defined as increased community unity.

Tangible changes were most evident in communities, but changes were also evident in reduced staff and budget inputs by CADECOM / Caritas Gokwe and Hwange and government to support community development work. CADECOM / Caritas Gokwe and Hwange staff also described improvements in their own lives as a result of applying SBAs within their own home contexts.

### ***Comparison of different development approaches:***

The research found differences in practice between SBA and other approaches. SBAs:

- Valued people and place as rich in resources in contrast to poor and dependent
- Engaged community from the beginning in contrast to top-down approaches

- Enabled targeted and focused approaches to address priority issues in the community.

The difference in change resulting from SBA compared to other approaches included

- Strengthened community ownership and sustainability compared to needs-based approach
- Strengthened citizen-led development compared to a passive community.

## **Recommendations**

The research identified recommendations for ongoing implementation of SBAs. The recommendations will also be relevant to CADECOM / Caritas Gokwe and Hwange, and may apply to practice beyond the research sites. Further details are provided in the body of the report.

Key conditions that support SBAs are discussed:

1. Institutional and organisational practices must be in place as a foundation to support SBAs.
2. Ongoing staff development should be resourced to support quality practice and outcomes through SBAs.
3. Key local government stakeholders should be included as counterparts to SBAs, to encourage champions of this approach and increase sustainability of SBAs.

Recommendations for practices of SBAs include:

4. CA or CADECOM articulate the complementarity of rights and strengths-based perspectives within SBAs, and training is provided for staff on this perspective. This theoretical and practical guidance will also provide a contribution to the broader development sector.
5. Recognising the inter-linkages and reinforcing nature of changes across multiple dimensions (e.g. attitudinal, relational and tangible) there is a need to ensure that all types of changes are valued within project theories of change and measured within M&E systems to assess progress and demonstrate impact.
6. Recognise and value a network approach (i.e. unplanned sharing and influence of SBAs beyond expected program boundaries) to extend impact of SBAs beyond an initial investment.
7. Advocate for the practice of SBAs at local and national levels of government to harmonise SBAs with government development agendas and approaches. Consistent development approaches offer the potential for stronger development outcomes.
8. Conduct further research and M&E to investigate views expressed during the research, that outcomes generated through SBAs are more likely sustained by communities. An evidence base on sustainability of projects informed by SBAs would provide important value to ongoing learning of SBAs.
9. Recognising that views expressed about SBAs were uniformly favourable by all stakeholder groups across all research sites, it is recommended that ongoing implementation of SBAs continues.

# 1 Background

Caritas Australia (CA) started to use Strengths-Based Approaches (SBAs) in Africa in 2011 within the Australia Africa Community Engagement Scheme (AACES) program in Malawi and Tanzania. This 5-year program demonstrated strong results and various external reviews positively evaluated the program. Since 2011, the Africa and Latin America (ALA) group in CA have gradually incorporated SBAs across African projects including continuing use in Malawi and Tanzania and implementation in Zimbabwe since 2015.

The use of SBAs is critical to the ALA strategy and has increasingly influenced the work of CA in other regions. In the ALA Regional Plan (2015-18) one of the key outcome areas is:

*‘By 2018 all ALA Programs have a deep integration of a SBA/ABCD<sup>5</sup> and can demonstrate how this approach is different from previous approaches’.*

As SBAs are central to the development approach of CA and considerable investment has been made to build staff capacity, it was deemed necessary to critically appraise the adoption of the approach. This research seeks to respond to this need.

## 2 Research approach and methodology

### 2.1 Purpose

This research analyses the impact of SBAs in select CA projects in Malawi and Zimbabwe. It seeks to provide insights for CA about the practice and outcomes of SBAs in order to improve future CA programs.

### 2.2 Research questions

The following research questions guided the data collection, analysis and report preparation:

1. What are the factors / conditions that support implementation of SBAs and changes resulting?
  - How should factors / conditions be enhanced to better enable implementation of SBAs?
2. What dimensions<sup>6</sup> of change are experienced by different stakeholders<sup>7</sup> which employ SBAs?
  - How and why are dimensions of change significant to different stakeholder groups?
3. What is the localised practice of SBAs, including innovation of SBAs in the selected projects?
4. Is there a difference in experience and change resulting from SBAs compared to other development approaches?
  - How and why are dimensions of change resulting from different approaches significant to different stakeholder groups?
5. Informed by the research findings, what are the key recommendations to CA (ALA) that will inform the ongoing implementation of SBAs?
  - What are the key practices within a SBA relevant to different dimensions of change?
  - What are the key conditions/factors that best support a SBA?

---

<sup>5</sup> ABCD: Asset Based Community-driven Development.

<sup>6</sup> Dimensions of change are defined as: attitudinal; relational; tangible.

<sup>7</sup> Project stakeholders in each location are: CA; in-country partners (Caritas Hwange, Caritas Gokwe, CADECOM Malawi (differentiated as CADECOM Mzuzu and CADECOM Lilongwe where appropriate); communities and district government extension officers.

## 2.3 Research methodology and methods

An analytical framework was prepared by ISF to frame the research inquiry. The framework was informed by the research purpose and questions and provided a means to explore ‘what works for whom and under what conditions’. The framework is provided in Appendix A.

The research used the following methods:

- **Literature review** of select project design documents, evaluations and ABCD training material<sup>8</sup> to provide context to the projects, an overview of outcomes and background to CA’s practice of SBAs.
- **Interviews** with key informants (key informant interviews - KII) across all stakeholder groups captured a depth of data to compare different experiences within and across projects.
- **Focus group discussions** (FGDs) were used to explore experiences of different stakeholders. Appendix B includes a list of KIIs and FGDs conducted.
- **Data analysis** was guided by the analytical framework to structure and make sense of responses to the research questions.

A CA staff member supported the ISF led fieldwork. This provided value to the learning process and consolidated the research findings in this report. Initial findings were validated with CA to ensure accuracy and relevance.<sup>9</sup>

## 2.4 Research location and participants

The fieldwork component of the research was completed in four project sites in two countries: Malawi (Rumphi and Dowa) and Zimbabwe (Gokwe and Hwange) from 22 May to Saturday 3 June 2017, with two follow-up interviews of CA staff in Australia in September 2017.

Table 1 shows a summary of the Malawi and Zimbabwe research sites. AACES projects in Malawi have applied SBAs since 2011 and were completed in 2016, while in Zimbabwe, SBAs have been used since 2015 and 2016.

**Table 1: Research sites / Projects**

Country	Location <sup>10</sup>	Start / finish	Funding scheme	Project staff structure / villages
Malawi	Mzuzu	2011 - 2016	AACES	4 Field officers 1 Project coordinator 20 villages
	Rumphi	2011 - 2016	AACES	2 Field Officers 1 Project coordinator Approx. 20 villages
Zimbabwe	Gokwe	July 2015 - ongoing	ANCP	1 Field officer 1 Project coordinator 4 villages
	Hwange	July 2016 - ongoing	ANCP	2 Field officers 1 Project coordinator 6 villages

<sup>8</sup> Documents include Wanjohi et al. 2016; Chivhinge 2016; Caritas Hwange 2015; Caritas Australia 2015; Peters & Eliasov 2014; Eliasov 2014 and Dureau & Wanjohi 2014, refer to Section 6 for detailed list of documents reviewed for the research

<sup>9</sup> Phone conversation with CA 23 June 2017

<sup>10</sup> Caritas/CADECOM have multiple project sites in Mzuzu, Dowa, Gokwe and Hwange. Specific village locations of research sites are listed in Appendix B

ISF provided guidance to organise a sample of participants for the research based on the stakeholder groups shown in Table 2 below. The importance of gender and social inclusion was considered, and separate female and male FGDs were organised to maximise active participation and research learning. The sampling strategy for each stakeholder group varied and is also shown in Table 2.

**Table 2: Research participants / stakeholder groups / sampling**

	<b>Malawi</b>	<b>Zimbabwe</b>	<b>Australia</b>	<b>Sampling</b>
<b>Staff</b>	CADECOM Malawi including staff from Rumphu and Dowa field offices	Caritas Gokwe and Caritas Hwange	Caritas Australia ALA, M&E and country staff	Purposively sampled based on role in SBAs
<b>Local government</b>	Representatives in Rumphu and Dowa	Representatives in Gokwe and Hwange	-	Purposively sampled based on connection with SBAs in each research site
<b>Community</b>	Representatives from Rumphu and Dowa	Representatives Gokwe and Hwange	-	Self-selected informed by open invitation

Appendix B includes a full list of deidentified participants and research activities.

## 2.5 Research limitations

Limitations of the research need to be acknowledged to guide the interpretation of the research findings and subsequent decisions informed by the research.

The research deliberately did not seek to validate or quantify project outcomes (tangible changes) such as infrastructure or health changes, these are the subject of previous evaluations. Tangible changes referred to in this report are based on research participants experiences of change and observations made during the research fieldwork.

The research sites were chosen by CADECOM / Caritas Gokwe and Hwange staff based on opportunity for best learning and also time and logistical constraints. SBA practice in Malawi in particular is considered to be strong and Zimbabwe is in earlier stages of implementation. The research findings may not be demonstrative of practice in other locations.

Community representatives self-selected their participation in the research. Research participants were recorded by name, gender and disability. The limited scope of the research meant that further disaggregation based on age or socio-economic background was not carried out. Due to the self-selection, limited number of research sites and participants, there is likely to be a level of community demographic diversity and variance of experiences of SBAs not reflected in this report.<sup>11</sup>

Finally, the research has relied on recall of CADECOM / Caritas Gokwe and Hwange staff, government and community representatives to make comparisons between SBAs and other project approaches. Research findings are subject to the limitations of 'recall', described as: 'differences in the accuracy or completeness of the recollections retrieved ("recalled") by study

---

<sup>11</sup> We note the generic term 'community' used within the report does not reflect levels of diversity and difference of opinion located in people in place.

participants regarding events or experiences from the past.<sup>12</sup> While recognising this limitation, the research found that comparing SBAs to other development approaches offers valuable insights and learning about SBAs.

The following section reports on findings from the research.

## 3 Findings

This section provides findings in response to the research questions, categorised as:

1. The localised practice of SBAs including innovation of SBAs in the selected projects;
2. The factors / conditions that support implementation of SBAs and changes resulting;
3. The dimensions<sup>13</sup> of change experienced by different stakeholders as a result of SBAs; and
4. Difference in experience and change resulting from SBAs compared to other development approaches.

Informed by these research findings, Section 4 offers recommendations<sup>14</sup> to inform ongoing implementation of SBAs.

### Practical variance between projects and research findings

Before the research findings are presented it is important to acknowledge the difference in project implementation which affect the research findings. The implementation and impacts of SBAs varied in each location due to timing, resourcing and context (notably the status of government) for each of the projects. For example, in Malawi, the projects and staff development were well resourced, SBAs had been implemented for five years and operated in a relatively stable political environment. This is in contrast to Zimbabwe where projects have been running for a shorter period with less staff and a comparatively lower government capacity. The difference in experience is reflected in some of the findings where the evidence of SBA's impact is stronger and more nuanced in Malawi than Zimbabwe.

### 3.1 Localised practice of SBAs

#### ***What is the localised practice of SBAs, including innovation of SBAs in the selected projects?***

The research found:

- Similar SBA processes across all research sites
- CADECOM / Caritas Gokwe and Hwange staff and government provide support for community visions
- Annual planning and implementation cycles
- Local accountability through shared M&E and reporting
- Use of metaphors
- Innovative use of rights-based approaches

The research found similarities of the initial implementation of SBAs across all sites. This summary is further explored below.

---

<sup>12</sup> Last 2010, p.153.

<sup>13</sup> Dimensions of change are defined: attitudinal; relational; tangible and other, described later in Section 3.3

<sup>14</sup> In response to Research Question 5.

### 3.1.1 Similar SBA process across research locations

Figure 1 below shows a simplified process flow of SBAs common across sites for this research. The figure excludes CADECOM / Caritas Gokwe and Hwange staff pre-project planning or details of time frames spent on each phase.<sup>15</sup> Below we describe activities associated with different phases of the process.

**Phase 1:** Beginning at the top of the figure, approval for broad development objectives was sought from CA and district governments for all new projects. Approvals triggered a deeper engagement with communities and local government representatives.

**Accompaniment to communities:** CA, CADECOM, and Caritas Gokwe and Hwange staff enacted a partner ‘accompaniment’ approach which is represented in Figure 1 across Phases 2-5. This involved organisational and staff commitment to work as partners with community’s own agreed objectives. Practically, this meant supporting partner communities through the project process as required - ‘on-tap’ to support community priorities rather than ‘on-top’ deciding priorities.

**Phase 2:** CADECOM / Caritas Gokwe and Hwange staff facilitated community SBA training and a situation assessment including review of past success and existing assets. This phase in particular aligns with SBA practices and tools commonly referenced in SBA literature. For example, practices included:

- Reflecting on areas of local pride and past successes achieved independently in the community
- Visioning, dreaming of a desired future, typically done in sub-groups reflective of the diversity of voices (e.g., women, men, children, people living with disability [PLWD]) before coming together for collecting visioning<sup>16</sup>
- Mapping of available assets in the community and mapping of external stakeholders
- Use of ABCD’s leaky bucket tool to understand the local economy.

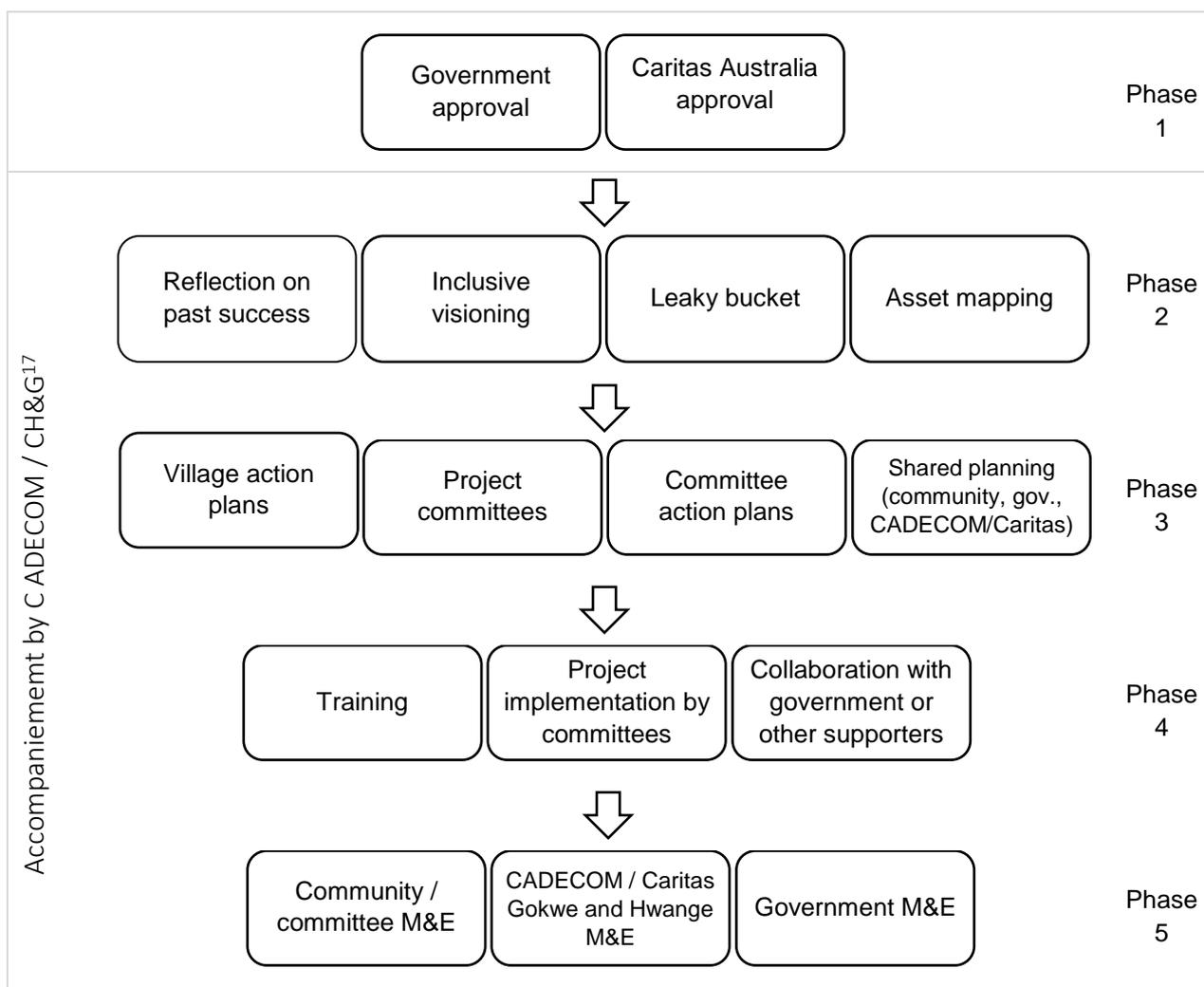
The SBA tools were used dynamically by the community and CADECOM / Caritas Gokwe and Hwange staff throughout project cycle. For example, staff referred to the use of the leaky bucket tool and visioning processes during monitoring visits, and community members reported taking lessons learned from SBA tools into committee meetings and individual households.

---

<sup>15</sup> For example, in Zimbabwe, the second phase (reflection, visioning, leaky bucket, asset mapping) and aspects of the third phase (action plans) were reported to be completed in two days. However, exact time frames for each site was not a focus of the investigation and is not represented in Figure 1.

<sup>16</sup> In all research sites, visioning was completed in separate groups with consideration for social inclusion (e.g. women and people living with disability meeting separately) before coming together for a facilitated process to negotiate a whole of community vision, including setting priorities based on people’s ability to contribute. In Gokwe, examples of group accountability and planning exercises included community debate and prioritising who should get direct assistance and who should ‘do’ on their own.

**Figure 1: SBA process and key phases**



**Phase 3:** A facilitated process was used to reach consensus on a community vision informed by priorities shared through the earlier small (homogeneous) group processes. The community then formed or activated existing committees to progress decided initiatives. These committees developed action plans with inputs (including co-contribution) from government and CADECOM / Caritas Gokwe and Hwange, the latter's contribution was described by staff in Malawi:

*'...we also look at, apart from us, as CADECOM, that we can provide this service, who are the other actors who can also do the same kind of work? So that we don't labour the project so much and doing what other actors, which even the government can do' - KII, CADECOM Malawi staff.*

Community visions and action plans were a key aspect of SBAs. These visions helped establish a strong foundation of local ownership evident across all project sites and described by all stakeholder groups who participated in the research. Ownership was attributed either specifically to community visions and action plans, or inferred in the value participants placed working on community priorities. Through these visions, communities defined their aspirations and how to achieve them.

**Phase 4:** The implementation phase of action plans was enabled through specific training and actions focused on decided priorities. Community members and committees completed relevant

<sup>17</sup> CH&G: Caritas Hwange and Caritas Gokwe

(sector based) training to inform work on the ground. Community representatives engaged with external stakeholders such as government, or at times the private sector to supplement their own efforts.

**Phase 5:** M&E was integrated into SBAs and initiated at the local (community) level and carried out through an action learning process within the whole project cycle. Community-led M&E was described by both community members and local staff in Malawi and Zimbabwe and the pragmatic approach was also described by CA staff:

*'...getting the partners to be trained in really how to monitor, how to gather information, how to bring the community in there, how to get the community to participate in their own reflecting instead of doing, doing, doing.'*

*[Describing community monitoring]...okay, this is what we said we are going to do, and this is what we've done. And we said we were going to do this, we haven't done it, yet. We've got six to nine months to do it, how are we going to do it as a community?' - FGD, CA staff, Australia.*

This practice of localised M&E strengthened community ownership. Community-based M&E informed CADECOM / Caritas Gokwe and Hwange and government monitoring as described further in the following sections below.

Different terminology was used to describe SBAs in Malawi and Zimbabwe,<sup>18</sup> though broad practices as illustrated in

---

<sup>18</sup> In Malawi staff tended to use the more general term SBAs to describe their practice, while in Zimbabwe, they described their practice as ABCD. This was reflective of the respective trainings they received.

Figure 1 were common to all.

The following section describes more specific elements of SBA localised practice revealed through the research.

### 3.1.2 Support for community visions

Community-based committees were championed to lead and implement projects. They were 'accompanied' by CADECOM / Caritas Gokwe and Hwange and the district government when required through service provision, resources and training.<sup>19</sup> Implementation and co-contribution from each of the stakeholders depended on the project and context, but the central element was leadership by community members themselves, as noted by a CADECOM Mzuzu staff member:

*'Because our structure was like, [there was a coordinator]... there were also field officers, who were facilitating the different activities. But they also had their own structure. From the field officers, they had an overall project committee that was comprised of different community members...*

*So those were two, under the project committee there were animators. So the animators as well, they were empowered. They were also able to sometimes, facilitate minor project activities that the field officers couldn't go at a certain day, they could do it on their own. The animators could do it. So they [the community] were designers, they were participants they were also facilitators at the same time...*

*At the community level, there were some who were coordinating the project, like the project committees. You could tell them "ok, as of now, probably with the funding, we don't have funding at the moment, but we want you to, to facilitate these activities. You might not have the field officers four times a week... maybe you will have the field officers coming here two times a week" but they could manage to write [do] the activities, they could manage to write reports and submit them to the project committee, and then the project committee could send to [us]... And so when the field officer is coming he could sometimes find everything set' - KII, CADECOM Mzuzu staff, Malawi.*

### 3.1.3 Annual planning and implementation cycles

Community actions plans in each project were revisited annually, which supported local ownership of planning, implementation and M&E. Through these relatively short planning cycles within a longer (three to five years) program, community-based strengths could be capitalised on and used to catalyse further rounds of action. Community members celebrated their achievement (through one annual cycle) and looked towards the next activities needed to achieve their visions<sup>20</sup>. Hence, the annual plans reinforced the practice and outcomes of SBAs.

Other features of annual plans were joint ownership, co-contribution and shared responsibility for the plan. After the first year, action plans informed CADECOM / Caritas Gokwe and Hwange budgets and planning and in some cases informed district development plans. This practice reinforced the centrality of the community vision, which in turn informed other stakeholder support.

### 3.1.4 Local accountability through shared M&E and reporting

The research also found that monitoring and evaluation (M&E) was centred with community ownership and fed into stakeholder M&E. Projects took a SBA approach to M&E with communities in control and accountable. At each of the four research sites, community-led M&E fed into CADECOM / Caritas Gokwe and Hwange and government M&E. Research participants described

---

<sup>19</sup> See section 3.3.1 for examples of training.

<sup>20</sup> This finding is substantiated by other research on SBAs, see Winterford 2013, p.97

multiple examples of sharing M&E reports between the three groups (community, government, CADECOM / Caritas).

The research team consider that sharing of M&E reports supported transparency and multiple accountabilities, and also strengthened relationships and shared commitment to achieving community decided project plans. When describing M&E in Malawi, the CADECOM team reported:

*'...community members they have their own action plans. They say maybe this year maybe we will drill two boreholes. At the end of that period, they say "ok let's check our action plans, have we done this, if not why. [This] means they are able to monitor and evaluate on their own... it becomes very easy...'* - FGD, CADECOM Mzuzu staff, Malawi.

### 3.1.5 Use of metaphors

During the research CADECOM / Caritas Gokwe and Hwange staff and community members frequently referred to metaphors from their ABCD training and toolkits to describe the practice of SBAs. Terms such as 'low and high hanging fruit' and 'the half-full glass' were often referred to, along with staff's biblical references. The use of metaphors helped sense-making and to communicate to others about the practices and processes of SBAs including visioning exercises, identifying existing strengths. This is demonstrated in an example from Zimbabwe:

*'I would also talk to them about when Lazarus was risen from the dead by Christ. They had tied him and even put a very big rock on the entrance to the grave. And when Christ went there, he didn't mean to do what they could do themselves, which is why he asked them to remove the stone because they were able to remove the stone.*

*So, we will not do for you what you can do on your own. When we see a stone we will ask you to remove the stone in our project. What you can't do is to raise Lazarus, but you can remove the stone' - KII, Caritas Gokwe staff, Zimbabwe.*

### 3.1.6 Innovative use of rights-based approach with SBAs

The research defined innovation as deliberate practices, unique to place, which built on original training in SBAs. There were multiple examples of practitioners and community members taking and adapting the SBA process to meet local goals. These included:

- Practitioners using their own SBA relevant metaphors to communicate SBA concepts (see above)
- Community members brought practices into their households
- Approaching conventional 'good' development practice and training with a strength lens. For example, viewing gender differences through a SBA lens. For example:

*'...how as a community, the people would participate and recognise each other's gifts, recognise the gift of women, recognise the gift of men' – FGD, CA.*

The most significant innovative practice was the deliberate use of a rights-based approach with SBAs, particularly in Malawi.<sup>21</sup> Malawi staff identified the practice of integrating rights-based approach and SBAs as two-fold. First, to leverage government duty bearers to supplement community's own strengths and efforts. Second, communities presented government their annual plans to inform government planning.

Importantly it was stressed by local staff that engagement with government was not seeking handouts but advocating to government in order that government meets its obligations of providing

---

<sup>21</sup> We note the rights-based approach was also used in Zimbabwe. In Malawi, it was specifically described as divergent from their conception of what 'accepted' SBA practice was.

services to communities and also to support community's own contributions. The rights-based approach is explored further in Section 3.3.1 whilst the following section describes factors that supported the implementation of SBAs.

## 3.2 Factors supporting SBAs

### ***What are the factors / conditions that support implementation of SBAs and changes resulting?***

The research found a variety of factors that supported SBAs:

- SBA training supported by monitoring
- Leadership
- CADECOM / Caritas Gokwe and Hwange as a broker rather than implementer
- Flexibility by design allowed support of community aspirations
- Alignment of vision, goals and implementation with community, CADECOM / Caritas Gokwe and Hwange staff and government
- Action planning informed decisions on co-contributions from each stakeholder
- Utilising existing government structures, government champions and positive relationships
- Local resources and community contribution; and
- Relevant skills training which supported action

This summary is further explored below.

### 3.2.1 SBA training supported by monitoring

Uptake of SBAs started with training. People rapidly embraced SBAs as noted by a CA staff member: *'it clicked... it makes sense, it is logical, and it is straight-forward'* (KII, CA staff). The trainings<sup>22</sup> provided the knowledge base for SBAs and demonstrated the philosophy of the approach in practice. For example, community, CADECOM / Caritas Gokwe and Hwange staff and government were often trained together equalising power dynamics. CA described training facilitation which drew on local knowledge in the room as examples of assets. SBA training helped catalyse and support leadership to 'run with' the SBA process. When asked what it was that helped bring people on board to the process, a CA staff member responded:

*'...people saying "this is the best training I have ever been to in my life, this revolutionises how I think about my life and how I think about my work and I can see how different it would be with communities if we work in this way". - FGD, CA staff, Australia*

CA also described the importance of follow-up monitoring and mentoring to training. This ensured SBAs were being fully adopted and supported by leadership and staff:

*'... sometimes it was really to reinforce and remind the different stakeholders of SBA because sometimes it might have been habitual or it might have just happened that people might lapse into deficit thinking. And of course, connected to that an important part of that is the program and project monitoring to see what is going on to talk to the stakeholders and see what they were thinking.. the essence of the monitoring particularly in the early stages it*

---

<sup>22</sup> We differentiate SBA training typically held in early stages of projects from specific sector based skills training which responded to community visions.

*changed from perhaps output of activity monitoring to actually thinking monitoring if you like... just to see how people were inculcating the approach' – KII, CA staff, Australia.*

### 3.2.2 Leadership

Leadership was reported as a key factor in the successful implementation of SBAs. This included leadership within CA<sup>23</sup>, CADECOM / Caritas Gokwe and Hwange, traditional leaders; and leadership via project committees and local champions. The boxed text below outlines the significance of different elements of leadership across stakeholders found through this research.

<p><u>Organisational leadership from CA:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CA's 'accompaniment approach' which saw them provide demand-based support to partners</li> <li>• CA invested in regular training for their staff and partner staff, supporting uptake and mainstreaming of SBAs</li> <li>• CA staff closely mentored Malawi and Zimbabwe national leadership in the transition to SBAs and modelled SBA behaviour</li> <li>• Leading by stepping back - in both Malawi and Zimbabwe, it was evident the nature of the partnership with CA left 'space' for local organisational staff to lead.</li> </ul>
<p><u>Organisational leadership in CADECOM / Caritas Gokwe and Hwange:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The organisational investment in SBAs was most evident in Malawi - national leadership was both passionate and competent in SBAs, they had delivered training to staff and external stakeholders, including other Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), and peer Caritas Organisations in other African countries</li> <li>• The high level of buy-in at an organisational level fostered the mainstreaming and nurturing of SBA practice and the internalisation of SBAs to guide individual worldviews. In Malawi, staff reflexivity of SBA practice was both an indicator and contributor of this internalisation. Staff modelling of the philosophy and behaviour of SBAs was demonstrated to influence uptake in communities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>'...if you didn't have someone like him, his leadership and his passion for this and his constant yeah...I couldn't say that they would have been exactly the same position in Malawi without someone like that' – FGD, CA staff, Australia.</i></li> </ul> </li> <li>• CA supported investment in both training and sharing of SBAs between staff through SBA training for multiple partners in Zimbabwe in 2014 and regular training and reflection workshops in Malawi for CADECOM staff (via AACES funding)</li> <li>• CADECOM / Caritas Gokwe and Hwange staff were embedded in the region, living in the relevant Diocese and spending approximately four days of the working week in or visiting communities</li> <li>• National leadership of SBAs in Zimbabwe was less evident and appeared less resourced. However, staff reported sharing experiences with SBAs between offices.</li> </ul>
<p><u>Traditional and community leaders:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decentralised approaches to initiatives via initiative-based committees allowed other (non-traditional) community leaders to emerge. In particular community-based 'Animators' were central to mobilisation and project success</li> <li>• Traditional leaders were described as both potential enablers or a barrier to SBAs. The quote below also illustrates how projects democratised or delegated leadership:</li> </ul>

<sup>23</sup> CA reported the original catalyst / leadership for SBAs came from the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) AACES design brief, which recommended SBA practice for AACES applicants.

*'Some issues could be due to leadership...The leader of the community, some are very responsive, accept things quickly, they are innovators... If the leader is proactive things go, if the leader is not proactive things stagnate... it could be difficult with the ceremonial leader because they're ceremonial. But in areas where they can actually select people who are proactive enough, the leadership of that nature would be much better. If the leader is not proactive, it might be very difficult. Things won't progress well' - KII, Caritas Hwange staff, Zimbabwe.*

Committees as 'houses for action', management and monitoring:

- Community committees were responsible for driving initiatives. These committees were formed or reactivated through the projects and covered areas such as child rights, gender, water, dam, poultry groups, etc. The committees became important 'houses' for planning and leading change within their area of specialisation
- Community members reported constitutions as important mechanisms for legitimising and providing structure to their operations, for example, by creating accountability through sanctions for non-participation
- CADECOM / Caritas Gokwe and Hwange staff supported the committees through governance training and the drafting of constitutions
- Committees provided the practical means through which to operationalise practices of SBAs

Early adopters as 'positive deviance':

- Early adopters were identified across all sites as important to support SBAs and the change process. Early adopters demonstrated that projects were possible and impactful, and others followed
- The impact of early adopters was reported between communities too. This included examples of communities or people outside of the project areas being inspired to take action after witnessing other's success:

*'We have established our own garden using our local resources...we realised people are generating income from those community gardens and taking their children to school. We said - "fine, we are not members of those gardens but we have resources so why can't we do our garden at home?" We were inspired by what we saw' - KII, Caritas Hwange Parish animator, Hwange, Zimbabwe.*

- Early adopters included community Animators, who were responsible for community mobilisation, provided training and reporting. Animators extended the reach of CADECOM / Caritas Gokwe into the communities. They were often pseudo-field staff, and maintained a permanent presence in the community, providing both practical support, training, monitoring and encouragement to community members and in doing so supported the uptake of projects.

*'It helped us in planning. As a wife, as a mother and as an animator, I had a program. I'm going to do these things at my house, after that I will be able to do this in the community. For me, I had to do it first at my house; I wanted people to see me as an example. I cannot go and tell the community what to do if I am not practising it at my household' - KII, community animators, Dowa, Malawi.*

### 3.2.3 CADECOM / Caritas Gokwe and Hwange as a broker rather than an implementer

Stakeholder mapping in the early stages of projects helped identify existing government or private sector actors and services, which supported community visions. CADECOM / Caritas Gokwe and Hwange staff brokered these relationships by assisting community members to identify, navigate and access government and the private sector. This approach intersected with the rights-based approach referenced earlier in Section 3.1.6 The ability to access services from government and an increased awareness of rights was valued by community members in all research locations.

CADECOM / Caritas Gokwe and Hwange also resourced the interactions between government and community members. For example, in some instances transport or logistical support was provided for government staff to attend SBA training. Although government engagement was more common, linkages with the private sector was also reported during the research. In Hwange, a solar panel and pump supplier provided training and service visits to a community agricultural program. Other examples included CADECOM / Caritas Gokwe and Hwange staff linking community members with trained masons and builders for toilet construction.

Government and private sector support (knowledge, services and resources) to the community was importantly in-line with community vision and aspirations. Knowledge gained through this external support was therefore directly and immediately applicable to local plans already decided by communities themselves, and external support added to the momentum of SBAs and locally defined initiated established in the design phase.

### 3.2.4 Flexibility by design allowed support of community aspirations

The deliberate flexibility by both CA and CADECOM / Caritas Gokwe and Hwange supported SBAs. This flexible design included action learning approaches to community action plans - as plans were completed or priorities changed, so did the support.

CADECOM / Caritas Gokwe and Hwange staff viewed this as a significant strength of SBAs. It meant the organisations could respond to community demands rather than impose an agenda, which was not prioritised or potentially irrelevant. A staff member in Zimbabwe described the ongoing analysis led at the community level:

*'this is what our situation was like, this is what we said we wanted to do, these were our low hanging fruits, these were our high hanging fruits, are they still the same?' - KII, Caritas Hwange staff, Zimbabwe.*

Though not directly referenced by staff during the research, it was evident the integrated development approach of CA and CADECOM / Caritas Gokwe and Hwange complemented SBAs. Flexibility enabled engagement across diverse thematic areas. When asked what made the project flexible, in Mzuzu we heard the following:

*'Of course, it is the approach but also the design... because the communities are designers themselves. So you need to be flexible enough to be able to respond to their aspirations. For if on the action plan they had prioritised issues of youth empowerment, issues of adult literacy, education, and then you are bringing in a different thing, then for them it is like you are demotivating them' - KII, CADECOM Mzuzu staff, Malawi.*

### 3.2.5 Alignment of vision, goals and implementation with community, CADECOM / Caritas Gokwe and Hwange staff and government

Across all project sites, the research found alignment between stakeholder views on priority initiatives implemented in the community. CADECOM / Caritas Gokwe and Hwange staff reported how community visions and subsequent action plans aligned with government plans and in most cases thematic focus areas of their own organisations. In the case of Malawi, community action plans informed district development plans. Staff in Hwange, Zimbabwe, referred to similar connection between the national government ZimAsset<sup>24</sup> plan and SBAs, *it '[ZimAsset] emphasises on the community, to make use of the available resources they have... so the government says we should use the resources to help the people'* - KII, Caritas Hwange staff, Zimbabwe.

---

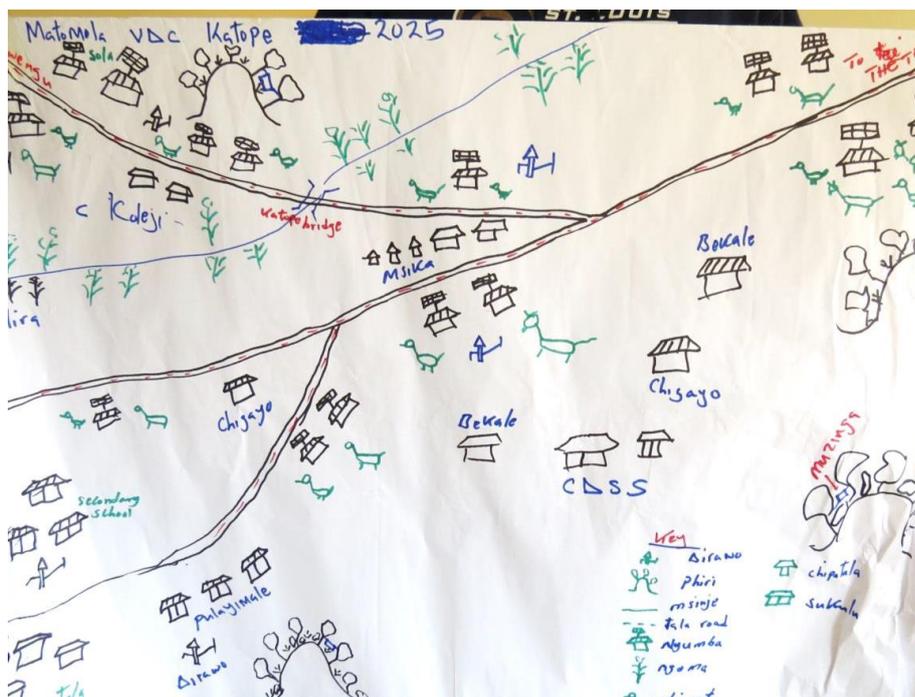
<sup>24</sup> ZimAsset: Zimbabwe Agenda for Sustainable Socio-Economic Transformation

The alignment of activities and visions ensured stakeholders moved in the same direction and flexibility gave CA, CADECOM / Caritas Gokwe and Hwange and district government staff the mandate to support community defined action priorities.

The alignment of how projects progressed (i.e. adoption of SBA principles) was influenced through SBA training where all relevant stakeholders attended.<sup>25</sup> A CADECOM staff member noted:

*'You can train CADECOM staff, but if the government officers who are the main duty bearers are using a different approach, it will dilute the whole thing'* - KII, CADECOM Malawi staff.

**Figure 2: 2050 Community Vision from Mzuzu, Malawi**



### 3.2.6 Action planning informed decisions on co-contributions from each stakeholder

Co-contribution for implementation of action plans was described as a shared and transparent negotiation between the community and CADECOM / Caritas Gokwe and Hwange, and to a lesser extent, government. CADECOM / Caritas Gokwe and Hwange staff shared information about their available financial and human resources, and communities would discuss and determine their contribution to materials, finances, labour and management. Short and long-term actions were based on the available assets and the community priorities. The importance of transparency in this process was described in Zimbabwe:

*'The issue of transparency and telling the truth is very important. So they know what they can do [within the budget], so that they can also get other means'* - KII, Caritas Hwange staff, Zimbabwe.

### 3.2.7 Utilising existing government structures, government champions and positive relationships

District governments, as partners, supported the practice of SBA. Positive relationships and meaningful involvement of district government extension officers supported the SBA process.

<sup>25</sup> Note, we did not collect data on how many government staff were operating in the project areas nor how many attended training.

Across all research sites, extension officers provided relevant skills which were demand-driven from the community. During the research fieldwork, extension officers reported either awareness or adoption of SBAs in their own practice. An extension officer in Malawi stated: *'it has proved the best so far of the approaches we have to work with communities.'* While in Zimbabwe a veterinary officer reported *'if it [SBAs] was introduced long back, the communities here would be far ahead in development'*. In addition to building skills via training and direct support to communities, the engagement with government strengthened community capacity to identify, access and engage with duty bearers positively.

A key enabler of government partnerships was the transparent and collaborative approach by CADECOM / Caritas Gokwe and Hwange and the acknowledgement of government's long-term role in community development, beyond project timelines. In Zimbabwe, a Caritas staff member went as far to describe the project as a government (not Caritas) project.

CADECOM / Caritas Gokwe and Hwange staff reported their participation in regular coordination and monitoring meetings with district government and other non-governmental organisations (NGOs) as part of development coordination meetings. This had two benefits. Firstly, it reduced the risk of duplication of activities and exposing communities to needs-based approaches, which may have compromised the uptake of SBAs. Secondly, the meetings provided an opportunity for CADECOM / Caritas Gokwe and Hwange staff to share SBA project successes, receive external positive feedback and reinforce the value of the SBA practice to themselves and external stakeholders.

### 3.2.8 Local resources and community contribution

Willingness of community members to discuss and contribute their own resources to decide development priorities supported the SBA process. When asked 'what supports the ABCD at a community level?', a Caritas Hwange staff member responded:

*'The participation of the community and the openness of the community that they have assets. Because previously, you know, you would ask the communities; "what do you have?" Some, because they know that if they say "we've got this and that", they might not even get aid or they might not be assisted... with the ABCD, especially now the communities doing the mapping, you know the communities tend to open up. And also giving - explaining why you are doing using ABCD tools helps the communities to open up'* - KII, Caritas Hwange staff, Zimbabwe.

The value of community contribution and links to strengthened ownership as a result, are discussed further in Section 3.3.1 below.

### 3.2.9 Relevant skills training which supported action

CADECOM / Caritas Gokwe and Hwange staff and government representatives provided targeted skills training which supported the success of SBAs. For some community members in Malawi and Zimbabwe, the change in knowledge from training and learning by doing, was cited during the research as their most significant change. Training became a critical vehicle for knowledge transfer and helped improve the quality of community-led initiatives. Examples of this included toilet construction, dip tanks, child rights, gender and governance structures.<sup>26</sup>

*'The great part has been they have actually seen change in their own lives. I think the reason they have done that is because we have been able to offer trainings and opportunities where they can learn what they didn't know, and what I didn't know and probably what the partners*

---

<sup>26</sup> Further examples are included in Section 3.3

*didn't know... So not just identifying their own gifts but they are on this "oh my God, these are our gifts, but boy, we have so much to learn" - FGD, CA staff, Australia.*

The following section outlines the changes across stakeholders (communities, CADECOM / Caritas Gokwe and Hwange staff and government) observed as a result of SBAs.

### 3.3 Dimensions of change

***What dimensions of change are experienced by different stakeholders which employ SBAs?***

The research found a variety of changes resulting from SBAs. Changes described by key stakeholders have been categorised using a well-being framework defining attitudinal, relational and tangible dimensions of change.

Experiences of changes across these three dimensions is summarised in Table 3 below and further explored in Sections 3.3.1 – 3.3.3.

As mentioned earlier in Section 2.2 above, for this research dimensions of change have been classified using an adapted version of White's (2010) framework of well-being in development:<sup>27</sup>

Attitudinal: Ways of thinking/feeling about self and others, ways of thinking/feeling about the current situation and future

Relational: Ways of interacting / being with others

Tangible: Physical changes in environment (i.e., change to natural environment, human-made structures, records), changes in knowledge or education (i.e. construction or accounting skills), tactile changes in self (i.e. wealth, health)

**Table 3: Summary of dimensions of change across stakeholder groups**

	<b>Attitudinal</b>	<b>Relational</b>	<b>Tangible</b>
<b>Community</b>	Finding value in people (self and other) and place Attitude of ownership, agency and reduced dependency Attitude of citizenship	Stronger and productive relationships between community and government Stronger/more inclusive relationships within families Greater 'unity' at a community level	Well-being outcomes (improvements in education/learning, basic services, food security, finances and health)
<b>CADECOM / Caritas Gokwe and Hwange</b>	Internalisation of a SBA worldview	Redefining working relationships with community Working with government and other stakeholders as partners	Role of development practitioner is easier Application of SBAs and improvements in own lives CADECOM / Caritas Gokwe and Hwange as a development leader

<sup>27</sup> Mathie and Peters (2014) used similar classification of changes based on an evaluation of a 10-year project in Ethiopia which used SBA's (ABCD)

	<b>Attitudinal</b>	<b>Relational</b>	<b>Tangible</b>
<b>Government</b>	Internalisation of a SBA worldview	Positive working relationship with community  Positive working relationship with CADECOM / Caritas Gokwe and Hwange staff	Reduced input of government resources  Delivering demand-based training  Shared successes with community  Government as SBA advocates

The research highlighted that dimensions of change resulting from SBAs often comprised all of these elements: combining, interacting and reinforcing one other and impacting all three stakeholder groups. Within the analysis, it was often difficult to classify change described by a stakeholder group. For example: for community members, changes in attitude through ‘a sense of self as a citizen with rights’, was intrinsically related to ‘relationships with government’ and was also described as having flow on to ‘tangible impacts’. Although difficult to classify, this complexity of change reflects the need to track multiple dimensions of change resulting from SBAs.

Another key finding was the cumulative nature of change in the projects reinforcing SBA impacts. For example: using the ‘sense of self as citizen’ example again, SBAs helped foster ‘confidence to engage with government’, which led to improved services from government, which then informed and supported future SBA based projects.

### 3.3.1 Changes experienced by community

#### **ATTITUDINAL CHANGE - finding value in people (self and others) and place**

In all research sites, examples were provided of how asset mapping of individual and collective local assets (including natural assets) were central to finding richness in the local context (place), boosted self-esteem and changed levels of agency. Individuals described how they saw opportunities and pathways to change through identifying and utilising their existing assets, working with others and leveraging external stakeholders. This is illustrated by FGDs in Malawi and Zimbabwe:

*‘I have never really considered my mind as an asset before. Through the SBAs, I am able to think about the resources that are available in the village. In the past, I would just see sand everywhere, but now I will see sand as an asset, “ok I can build a house with sand”... it has opened my mind to think about those resources rather than things which just exist in the area’ - FGD, community member, Mzuzu, Malawi.*

*‘I was very happy when we were asked what we were proud of, we didn’t realise we had so much...’ - FGD, community member, Gokwe, Zimbabwe.*

Community members in all locations also reported finding increased courage and confidence to engage with other stakeholders. Attitudes changed towards government officials, for example:

*‘Initially, we thought government officers were unapproachable; we did not think we would have an opportunity to present our issues to government officers. Because of SBAs we feel confident to approach government officers in all issues that affect us’ - FGD, community member, Mzuzu, Malawi.*

## **ATTITUDINAL CHANGE - attitude of ownership, agency and reduced dependency**

A strong sense of community ownership of projects was evident across all research sites and was one of the most prominent themes to emerge from the research. Messages of 'this is ours' were unequivocal, as illustrated by a woman in Hwange:

*'This ABCD approach instils a sense of ownership of the projects, previously what was happening, organisations would just come and just impose or just give us a project. So if anything happens, you wouldn't care much. But ... the way we worked here, you actually guard this project jealously, you do not want this project to fail because of the contribution we put together in this project'* - FGD, community member, Hwange, Zimbabwe.

All stakeholders attributed this strong sense of ownership to features of the SBA process including working from local priorities and using local strengths via community-led design, planning, contribution (labour, expertise and resources), management and monitoring. Ownership was validated in project successes, reinforcing an increased sense of self-sufficiency. This was most evident in Malawi where collaboration with CADECOM had finished twelve months ago but the motivations and direction remained. For example, a woman reported:

*'...even if CADECOM moves out today, we know we are able to do things on our own without CADECOM's help'* - FGD, community member, Mzuzu, Malawi.

Research participants in both Zimbabwe and Malawi described reduced community dependency and increased agency in achieving local aspirations. As observed by a government councillor in Zimbabwe, *'the dependency syndrome is moving away'*. This view was also expressed by community members in Malawi and Caritas staff in Australia as noted below:

*'When people would come to the community, all we knew was "can you give us something?" – It was more like our behaviour. So to change from that mindset that "not everyone who comes here we have to ask for something" or "we don't always have to beg for help", it nearly took us two years to understand that "half empty to half full"... - KII, community animator, Dowa, Malawi.*

*'...and the difference being is that once you recognise your skills, you can transfer that to anything and it doesn't stop. I mean we have got those examples of communities actually saying we don't need any more funding'* - FGD, CA, Australia.

## **ATTITUDINAL CHANGE: attitude of citizenship**

A significant finding from Malawi was the incorporation of rights-based approaches to advocate for government contribution to help communities achieve and sustain their vision.<sup>28</sup> A combination of stakeholder mapping and rights-based training developed community understanding of government responsibilities, and approaches to access government services. This strengthened courage and agency to advocate for their rights as described:

*'Within the training sessions of SBAs, we came to realise that development is a right provided for in the constitution of the Republic of Malawi. In Section 50 [it] gives every citizen the right to development. After learning that that is a right, we had the courage to go and engage the service provider. Based on this as a right for us, we feel this is an obligation of the government to do 1, 2, 3, 4'* - FGD, community member, Mzuzu, Malawi.

Attitudes of citizenship and strengthened engagement with government had significant implications for projects in all sites, although 'citizenship' was more evident in Malawi where working

---

<sup>28</sup> This was less evident in Zimbabwe where the understanding on rights was situated more in the family context and less with respect to government.

relationships with government had developed over the five-year period. Working relationships with governments are discussed further in the following 'relational' change section below.

### **RELATIONAL CHANGE - stronger and productive relationships between community and government**

Research participants in all sites reported stronger relationships between community and government. This relational change was activated by changing 'attitudes of citizenship' and community members finding means to access and advocate directly with government stakeholders as referenced earlier. The relationships were facilitated through mobilisation and relationship brokering from CADECOM / Caritas Gokwe and Hwange, the community training in rights and citizenship and cemented by communities and government working together on shared aims with mutual contributions.

Change in community-government relationships was noted by a male community member in the Hwange FGD, *'because ABCD took us through the process, our attitude toward [the government officers] has changed – [there is] more respect.'*

Collaboration between government and community early in the planning process helped foster mutual respect, established ways of working together and led to government provision of relevant, demand-based training. Again, this highlighted the foundational importance of community visions as a basis for both action and fostering relationships. As noted by a CADECOM Mzuzu staff member:

*'It's not just me saying let's go together with the government officer to deliver training - that can be good but has a number of challenges, it triggers some expectations from the communities - but now communities invite who they want to come. The communities are helped and they get the service they want. The community invite the government extension officers themselves, demand-driven. But they won't start demanding this support unless they know what they want the support for. It could take years and years, but in the implementation plan, we let them know there are others they can call on to help. In the end, they call the extension officers as they are closer' - FGD, CADECOM Mzuzu staff, Malawi.*

### **RELATIONAL CHANGE - stronger/more inclusive relationships within families**

Changing relationships within households was also reported in all research sites. In Zimbabwe, this included women reporting reduced conflict, through increased financial independence and fewer shortages of essentials such as food. Community members also reported changed gender roles and a shift towards greater equity of labour burden, changes in attitudes towards children, particularly recognition of child rights. These changes can not only be attributed to SBAs, as local programming of SBAs also included other 'good development approaches', such as gender and child rights training in both countries.<sup>29</sup> Though as noted below, the strengths-based perspective may enable the messages of inclusion and respect to be more accepted:

*'I would think the communities that have attended the SBA training, or have been working with us through the SBA lens, would probably be more open to child protection conversations... because they would feel that they are in the driving seat that isn't something that is being imposed' - FGD, CA staff, Australia.*

---

<sup>29</sup> Are project activities like gender or child protection training considered as part of SBAs? The research did not establish consensus to answering this question and it depends if SBAs are defined as a philosophy and/or a set of tools. Tools and training including in the projects (e.g. gender training etc), are not unique to SBAs. However, some staff argue, that if gender or child protection training is identified as a local priority – they are a strengths practice. As a minimum, staff and community tended to view the trainings as complementary rather than contradictory to SBAs and reported conducting some trainings with a strength-based lens, such as the example quoted where men and women are considered with respect to their 'gifts'.

## **RELATIONAL CHANGE - stronger working relationships in community described as ‘greater unity’**

Community members in all sites reported improved relationships resulting in greater community ‘unity’. The foundation for this change was the shared vision, cemented through collective action. As described by a community member in a Gokwe FGD *‘[the project] has brought people together – uniting the community because of the same set goals. This has reduced conflicts’*. During the FGD with women in Hwange Zimbabwe, participants noted the power of working together: *‘Because of planning, meeting regularly and working together, this encouraged us to work as a family’*. Another participant in the same FGD noted: *‘We realise that through unity, we would achieve what we wanted. It was the only way our project would succeed.’*

## **TANGIBLE CHANGE: improvements in education/learning, basic services, food security, finances and health**

As discussed in the research limitations section, identifying tangible changes was not a core focus of the research due to time limitations of the research and because these changes have been the subject of previous evaluations.<sup>30</sup> Here we only briefly note tangible changes described by community members. The nature of tangible changes varied between locations depending on the community and project focus. We have listed changes reported at all research sites below, but refer readers to previous reports (see Section 6 ) for a more comprehensive analysis.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Improved cook stoves</li><li>• Additional water points for domestic and agricultural use</li><li>• Village savings and loans schemes</li><li>• Improved access to sanitation through toilet construction</li><li>• Improvements to housing</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Road construction</li><li>• Skill and knowledge development<sup>31</sup></li><li>• Greater food security through initiatives such as seed banks</li><li>• Enterprises – bee keeping, fowl businesses</li><li>• Improved water for agriculture</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Higher production in agriculture (both livestock and crops)</li><li>• Improved access to health services</li><li>• Reductions in domestic violence</li><li>• Reductions in child trafficking</li></ul>
--	---	--

Research participants also described flow on effects between these and to other tangible benefits. For example: improved agricultural waters reduced times to collect water; improved the agricultural production; provided additional food and income which was spent on children’s education.

The following section describes changes experienced by project staff in Malawi and Zimbabwe.

### **3.3.2 Changes experienced by CADECOM / Caritas Gokwe and Hwange**

#### **ATTITUDINAL CHANGE - internalisation of SBA worldview**

The research revealed varying attitudes towards a strengths perspective across all four research sites. For some staff, SBA was described as a set of tools and approach to development, while for others, it was more influential as a worldview or lens through which to see the world. For a staff member in Zimbabwe, the philosophical adoption of SBAs was not identified as a change per se, but his description of SBAs demonstrated the extent to which he embodied SBA philosophy:

<sup>30</sup> Refer to methodology and references section for details of reports.

<sup>31</sup> Including for: pump repairs; building construction; stove construction; committee governance; project management; financial management; improved agricultural methods; navigating government; child rights; and gender awareness.

*'Everybody is an asset... the human being, the strength that they have physically or mentally, they are an asset. Your [community] contribution is very important, without you, things won't move. Without you, old lady, things won't move' - KII, Caritas Hwange staff, Zimbabwe.*

Another staff member noted the change of attitude within SBAs, how he viewed the community he was working with and his role:

*'That to me has been one learning that we have had over five years... where else can you look for support?...you recognise you can't be the sole problem solver. That they [the community] can mobilise themselves.*

*'At first, you have to change your attitude. You have to change from a top-down approach. But first, you focus on the strengths of the community. In the past, at CADECOM we would focus much on the problems, but now we focus on their strengths, we focus on this. By focusing on this, we empower the communities' - KII, CADECOM Mzuzu staff, Malawi.*

Internalisation of a SBA worldview was supported by enthusiastic leadership, training, mentoring and reflective practices in Malawi.

*'For me, I have learned to look at things in a positive way. When [manager/trainer] presented the glass at first I thought it was half empty. It has helped me to look at things in a positive way' - KII, CADECOM Mzuzu staff, Malawi.*

Whilst the research revealed that not all staff have internalised the philosophy of SBAs to the same degree, which is reasonable considering the different range of exposure across the different project sites, the practice of SBAs was consistently and emphatically reported as the preferred development approach for staff across all sites.

### **RELATIONAL CHANGE - redefined working relationships with community**

In both country contexts SBAs has redefined working relationships of CADECOM / Caritas Gokwe and Hwange staff with communities. In Malawi staff described their roles as facilitators. In Zimbabwe, a staff member described his role as a networker - creating linkages with the community and external stakeholders. Staff described a joint practice of working collaboratively with communities within SBAs:

*'Because needs based sometimes brings to the people things that are not relevant at this time. In the needs-based, people think they are beneficiaries, not participants. People always expect you to bring something. They look up to you as having all the knowledge and resources and everything. In SBA everyone is contributing something' - KII, CADECOM Malawi staff.*

### **RELATIONAL CHANGE - working with government and other stakeholders as partners**

The research identified positive relationships between CADECOM / Caritas Gokwe and Hwange staff and district government stakeholders, though this was not uniform across all research sites.<sup>32</sup> Some government extension officers interviewed were less engaged and knew less about the SBA foundations of projects. This was in contrast to other government extension officers who had a close and collaborative relationship with CADECOM / Caritas Gokwe and Hwange staff and were champions of SBAs. A relationship of working as partners was reinforced by respect for the continuing role of government in the community. As noted by one extension officer:

---

<sup>32</sup> The research did not collect data on the number of extension officers operating in the area, nor gauge if a 'critical mass' of extension officers was necessary to support the SBA process.

*'I think that is why CADECOM thought to involve us. The project [AACES] is three to five years, then go. But we are here forever' - FGD, government extension worker, Mzuzu, Malawi.*

Numerous tangible changes resulting from SBAs were evident for CADECOM / Caritas Gokwe and Hwange staff as outlined below.

### **TANGIBLE CHANGE - role of development practitioner is easier**

Staff<sup>33</sup> across all research sites reported that SBAs had resulted in community's proactive role in mobilising, organising, implementing and reporting, which meant staff resources and 'burden to provide' motivation for these activities had reduced. Staff in both Malawi and Zimbabwe stated they could not go back to previous (needs based) approaches for philosophical and tangible reasons. It was also evident from the tone of staff they were enjoying the change:

*'Your job as Caritas has really been made easier because the communities are now self-motivated... They are now pushing the development agenda on their own; they aren't waiting for us to push them to participate in the projects. I think they are now well organised at the local level with the involvement of the village heads, the headmen, the committees. They organise themselves.*

*Ours is just to go, just to check the things are moving, and you know there is always progress whenever you go back to see a project, there is always progress. Yeah, we don't have a lot of hassles to push people to get involved in the projects. And because of that, I think our program is really going to succeed.'* - KII, Caritas Hwange staff, Zimbabwe.

Financial efficiencies were also reported in Zimbabwe, where community labour and materials contribution meant Caritas finances could be leveraged for other community projects.

### **TANGIBLE CHANGE - application of SBAs and improvements in own lives**

Internalisation of a SBA worldview (see above) for many staff has led to the use of SBAs in their own lives, which helped create tangible changes. For example, SBAs inspired further study and improvements in livelihoods and home life. Tangible changes was described by one staff member:

*'Since 2015 I have started farming as a business... we were the ones training the communities how to make the manure, how to do new technologies of agriculture. I thought "if they can do it why can't I?" So in 2016 from selling maize ..., with the money I bought a plot, now I am building a house... the SBA has changed my mind' - KII, CADECOM Dowa staff, Malawi.*

### **TANGIBLE CHANGE - CADECOM / Caritas Gokwe and Hwange as a development leader**

The use of SBAs has enabled CADECOM / Caritas Gokwe and Hwange staff to be seen as development leaders amongst other NGOs, donors and government. CA staff also reported increasing respect for their work from donors and other NGOs through the AACES program. The reach of leadership and influence was most evident in Malawi where a long track record, maturity and confidence in their SBA approach, has created opportunities to advocate for SBAs through training and direct advocacy. Although in earlier stages, Caritas Hwange has also influenced others through the Simangani Project. They have hosted exposure visits from provincial government and other NGOs and also prepared media releases about SBAs.

During the research multiple examples were shared in Malawi where SBAs have been transferred to other development actors:<sup>34</sup>

---

<sup>33</sup> Staff - field officers, coordinators and program managers.

<sup>34</sup> Refer to Figure 3 for further description.

*'I was just in a reflection meeting with ..... (other INGO). It so happened that CADECOM was shining – we had to showcase more of the success stories in communities in comparison to other (INGO) partners. (The other INGO) liked that and found CADECOM has a better approach to development. They are now coming to CADECOM with other local partners to learn how CADECOM has achieved success. We are challenging our donors that they can't be a real-time supporter to that community if you don't have more flexibility. For example, EU<sup>35</sup> projects are pre-packed for five years. We are ringing the bell, and it is getting louder. Away from the subsidy approach' – FGD, CADECOM Mzuzu staff, Malawi.*

*'The district commissioner said, "you have to use the approach that CADECOM is using". For joint monitoring, we take people from other [government] departments (education etc.) to go and see' – KII, CADECOM Mzuzu staff, Malawi.*

The following section outlines changes in attitudes, relationships and tangible dimensions for government stakeholders.

### 3.3.3 Changes experienced by government

#### **ATTITUDINAL CHANGE - internalisation of a SBA worldview**

Similar to CADECOM / Caritas Gokwe and Hwange staff, government extension officers reported changes in attitudes towards communities and also their own roles.

In both Malawi and Zimbabwe, there was evidence that SBAs influenced the worldviews of some government extension workers. This was reflected in their own use of SBA practices. For example, one government extension officer noted:

*'According to me, ABCD should not end. ABCD is the way to go. As a department, we used to impose projects on the people. But now that's changed, we are now working in the participatory [ABCD] approach ...nowadays people are very much conscious in terms of development – if you want to achieve something you need to involve the community...' - KII, government extension officer, Hwange, Zimbabwe.*

The internalisation of SBAs philosophy was also evident in Mzuzu, Malawi where government extension officers reported using SBAs within their households:

*'I never knew anything about the leaky bucket up until when I was introduced to SBA. So that leaky bucket is a tool it has transformed my family how finances flow in my house' - FGD, government extension officer, Mzuzu, Malawi.*

#### **RELATIONAL CHANGE - positive working relationship (of government) with community**

Similar to community descriptions, government staff also described positive and productive working relationships with communities resulting from SBAs. Dimensions of changed relationships included government trainings responding to community defined aspirations rather than being imposed and stronger community contribution. This resulted in refined power relationships between government and communities. One government worker illustrated the changes in relationships:

*'The approach itself has brought a sense of respect among the communities. Because in the past, it was like, what he just said - it was the extension worker coming with a package. To them, it was like "oh so our views can be respected by somebody who went to school".... So they became proud, and every time you interact with them, they are free to express their*

---

<sup>35</sup> EU: European Union

*views. There has been a sense of respect to themselves’ - FGD, government extension officer, Mzuzu, Malawi.*

Changes in government community relationships and more particularly power dynamics is illustrated by another government official:

*‘The inferiority syndrome is not there. Before in the past when I go there using a motorcycle they would say “the boss has come” – to them they would look down on themselves.... But today when I come... the empowerment, and sense of knowing of resources which of course is theirs, is there...’*

*‘This project and the approach SBA, has in time killed the dependency syndrome from farmers. That syndrome where the farmers would just say “all things will come from outside, they will give us”. - FGD, government extension officer, Mzuzu, Malawi.*

### **RELATIONAL CHANGE - positive working relationship (of government) with CADECOM / Caritas Gokwe and Hwange staff**

Though not described as a change, but rather a point of difference to other NGOs, government staff described a positive working relationship with CADECOM / Caritas Gokwe and Hwange. This was described by government representatives in all research sites. As noted by one government worker:

*‘We work hand in hand with CADECOM. Usually other [NGOs] don’t come so open. CADECOM were so straight, so open. We have done 98% of the project with them’ - FGD, government extension officer, Dowa, Malawi.*

Government staff, like CADECOM / Caritas Gokwe and Hwange also described and valued sharing reports and having strong communications. This led to tangible outcomes for government in both Malawi and Zimbabwe described below.

### **TANGIBLE CHANGE - reduced input of government resources**

Many government extension officers reported they used fewer resources to motivate the community and sustain projects. Some of their experiences are illustrated below:

*‘Now with this approach, for government staff it has simplified our work in the extension services. Because we are adopting the same approach to impart to farmers to other sites where there was not this type of project.’ - FGD, male government extension officer, Mzuzu, Malawi.*

*‘The community has been able to identify and utilise the local resources... with the contribution of the community with their assets, it encourages them to fully participate. It’s not the donor providing everything...It is very unfortunate that the approach was [only] recently introduced in Hwange. If it were introduced long back the communities here would be far ahead in development’ - KII, government extension officer, Hwange, Zimbabwe.*

Reduced government resources was also observed by CADECOM / Caritas Gokwe and Hwange staff as illustrated:

*‘The government would use a lot of resources [in their programs]. But using this approach, our work is easier. It has helped us in other development activities other than AACES, we use fewer resources, and there is empowerment’ - FGD, CADECOM Mzuzu staff, Malawi.*

### **TANGIBLE CHANGE - government staff delivered demand-based training**

Community representatives, CADECOM / Caritas Gokwe and Hwange staff and government officials described how training delivered by government extension officers was demand-driven and responsive to community decided priorities and visions as set out in annual plans. Trainings included:

- Veterinary practices such as vaccinations
- nature conservation,
- livelihoods e.g. bee keeping, livestock
- dip tank construction
- toilet and building construction
- water supply
- hygiene
- nutrition
- child protection
- gender
- agricultural/cropping methods

### **TANGIBLE CHANGE - shared successes with community**

Work of government extension officers including demand-driven training (listed above) contributed to significant tangible changes at the community level as noted in Section 3.3.1 above. Caritas Hwange acknowledged the government ownership of the projects and role in project impacts:

*'It is their program<sup>36</sup>; they make follow-ups, make trainings, supervise how things are going on. It is actually their program, so they are at the forefront. Unlike us who are maybe there once per week' - KII, Caritas Hwange staff member, Zimbabwe.*

### **TANGIBLE CHANGE - government staff as SBA advocates**

Some extension officers have transferred their SBA practice into other communities and shared it with other extension officers. This is illustrated through extension officer's reported practice in Malawi:

*'We are now taking SBAs to other communities not in the AACES [area]' - FGD, government extension officer, Mzuzu, Malawi.*

*'That I won't forget in my life, was being introduced to SBA. Now I have made up an expertise where my office knows they can send me to Katabe I will perform. I was sent to formulate by-laws. I asked myself what is my entry point? Oh, ABCD... I was there for seven days, and we came up with the forest management plan and action plan...[they] made a commendation to my boss.' - FGD, government extension officer, Mzuzu, Malawi.*

Sharing SBA practice beyond immediate project partners is described further below.

#### **3.3.4 Change beyond project boundaries**

Project successes, enthusiasm for and accessibility of SBA practice, assisted community, CADECOM / Caritas Gokwe and Hwange and government to influence others not immediately involved in the projects across all sites. This flow on effect and extension of SBAs is depicted below in Figure 3 and was a significant finding for the research with core stakeholders and participants inside the dashed box. The figure represents the impact and leverage (as yet unquantified) of CA's support of SBA programs and the extent to which SBAs have also been taken up by local stakeholders.

Influence beyond project boundaries is described by one staff member:

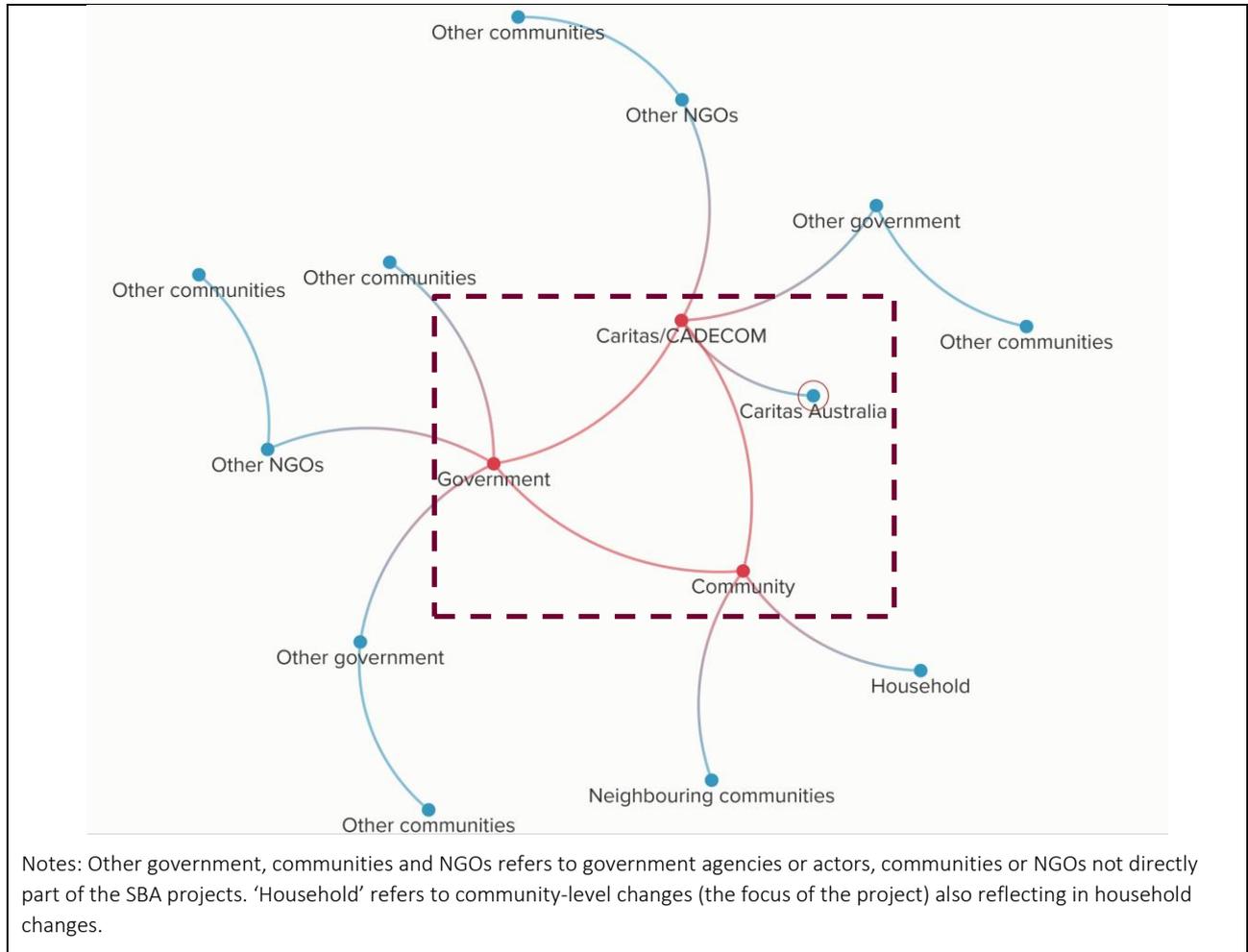
*'So we needed to reflect as an organisation. SBA has been a turning point for our organisation. Now when we get into program design even with other donors, we are in the*

---

<sup>36</sup> i.e. in contrast to a Caritas Hwange program.

*position where we say we want to work with SBA. We have demonstrated that with (other INGO/donor) and also with (other INGO/donor)' - FGD, CADECOM Mzuzu staff, Malawi.*

**Figure 3 - Government, community and CADECOM/CG&H influence beyond project boundaries.**



The next section reports stakeholder feedback comparing SBAs to other development approaches.

## 3.4 Comparison of different development approaches

### ***Is there a difference in experience and change resulting from SBAs compared to other development approaches?***

The research found differences in practice between SBA and other approaches. SBAs:

- Valued people and place as rich in resources in contrast to poor and dependent
- Engaged community from the beginning in contrast to top-down approaches; and
- Enabled targeted and focused approaches to address priority issues in the community.

The difference in change resulting from SBA compared to other approaches included, SBAs:

- Strengthened community ownership and sustainability compared to needs-based approach; and
- Strengthened citizen-led development compared to a passive community.

This summary is further explored below.

### 3.4.1 Differences in practice

Across the research sites, different stakeholder groups had varying experiences with development approaches, which meant that comparison between SBAs and other development approaches ranged from very specific to general in nature.

- Community: in all research sites community representatives reported minimal or irregular exposure to other NGO led projects. They also reported intermittent interactions with government programs before SBA projects. Consequently, there was less data from community member's comparison of SBAs with other approaches, and community responses tended to be general in nature.
- CADECOM / Caritas Gokwe and Hwange: Most staff are currently, or have previously worked with projects funded by donors/organisations besides CA. Many of these projects used more conventional programming approaches (e.g. needs-based, pre-determined activities and/or outcomes) and longer-term funding models (three-year planning cycles). Staff in Malawi and Zimbabwe reported attempts to influence these other projects based on their project success and preference for SBAs.

Differences between SBAs and other development approaches as described by the research participants are outlined below. Data was chosen from both targeted questions in interviews, FGDs, and from participants unsolicited comparisons.

#### **DIFFERENCE IN PRACTICE - SBAs value people and place as rich in resources in contrast to poor and dependent**

Staff, government and community representatives all described SBAs as different to other approaches in the way people and place were viewed. Within the practice of SBAs people and place are viewed as valuable resources with utility to progress development aspirations. This is compared to other approaches which view people as poor, dependent and passive. The different way of viewing people was described by a CA staff member:

*‘...everyone thinks being a missionary is giving, giving, giving and you know it is the people being dependent on the missionary... And so unless you let go of that, and so “I don't need to have the power and the way I can help you, is you help me, help yourself” - FGD, CA staff, Australia.*

Recognising the value of local resources through SBAs was described by CADECOM staff in Malawi:

*'Other programs are promoting "we are poor, we are poor, we are poor" our program is promoting "we are rich, we are rich, we are rich" - KII, CADECOM Mzuzu staff, Malawi.*

*'Here in paradise – people feel their community is the worst place to live. Other approaches have made people feel this way. People have changed their minds into receiving. So in SBA we look at the community as having something already, and build on what is there, exploit the resources they already have to the fullest' - FGD, CADECOM Mzuzu staff, Malawi.*

### **DIFFERENCE IN PRACTICE - SBAs engage community from the beginning in contrast to top-down approaches**

SBAs are considered different since they support community-led design informed by local priorities, compared to other approaches which are top-down. This difference was described by staff in all research sites and the majority of community members. An example of this difference was provided in Zimbabwe:

*'...the [other donor] program is actually doing the opposite of what we are doing. The design is coming from above, the budget from above, everything from above you simply go and tell the people we are going to do this for you and so on and so on, it is quite different' - KII, Caritas Gokwe staff, Zimbabwe.*

*'This one [SBAs] is unique... we are involving the community right from the planning, right up to the evaluation of the project. You know all the stages of the project we were involving the communities and the stakeholders' - KII, Caritas Hwange staff, Zimbabwe.*

### **DIFFERENCE IN PRACTICE - SBAs enable targeted and focused approach to address priority issues in the community**

CADECOM / Caritas Gokwe and Hwange staff described interlinked aspects of SBAs which help to address priority issues in the community.

Firstly, focusing on strengths helps to see opportunities. In turn, this provides a catalyst for taking action to support broad community visions. This first step is in contrast to identifying a range of needs that may not be a community priority and may isolate or ignore local strengths. One staff member in Malawi described this difference:

*'The needs-based approach, what it has done, it has limited the thinking of the people, has limited innovations, and has limited creativity because people only look at problems. They don't look at opportunities which are there. When you start opening up the area of opportunities, you realise that in life there are so many opportunities, some of which we don't realise as opportunities...*

*Over the past, we used the needs-based approaches. We draw the big beautiful problem trees with so many leaves of problems. But the challenge is to get into a program that would swallow all of that – respond to the community needs. When you ask this question, you start inviting the swarms of needs beyond the capacity of your organisation. So you go in thin with this specific program. But at the end, the conclusions are obvious – "we wished you could have helped with ... but you just did this specific area". But with the SBA you get the community to define their assets, and then think how we can complement this. So you are very neat and effective at the end of the day. With that minimum support, you give the changes are big.... In this approach you go in and focus where there is real need' - FGD, CADECOM Mzuzu staff, Malawi.*

Secondly, the emergent and adaptive planning cycle based on annual plans means that activities are informed by current community priorities and motivations. Staff in both Malawi and Zimbabwe highlighted that community priorities change with time, which makes the common practice of 3-year planning cycles less relevant. Annual planning means that Caritas and government staff can be 'agile' and responsive to community priorities, motivations and the momentum in the community. This flexibility is both a feature of SBAs and a function of the CA donor model. Flexible planning was described by staff as a point of difference between other development approaches:

*'Caritas Australia has always facilitated that [responding to annually revised action plans annually]... But within Caritas Gokwe, we have a bit of a challenge because the [other] Program is actually doing the opposite of what we are doing. The design is coming from above, the budget from above, everything from above you simply go and tell the people we are going to do this for you and so and so on, it is quite different' – KII, Caritas Gokwe, Zimbabwe.*

### 3.4.2 Differences in change

Changes resulting from SBAs compared to other approaches are described below.

#### **DIFFERENCE IN CHANGE - SBAs strengthen community ownership and sustainability compared to needs-based approach**

Staff, community and government representatives in all research sites commented on the high level of community ownership and active participation in projects informed by SBAs in contrast to other development partnerships. This view is illustrated by a response from a Caritas staff member:

*'Their participation I think is more than two-fold compared to the previous three years [when not using ABCD]' - KII, male Caritas Gokwe staff member, Zimbabwe.*

CADECOM / Caritas Gokwe and Hwange staff and community members at all sites commented on the perceptions of increased sustainability of SBA projects compared to projects implemented using other development approaches. Community members in Zimbabwe described how they would guard the project and see it as a legacy to hand to their children. Views on the increased sustainability as a result of SBAs are illustrated below:

*'The SBA changed our approach as programmers, implementers. Most of the programs have not been sustainable. Even the CA supported communities from 15 years back, we think people have gone back into a difficult situation...*

*I believe that even after our exit, go back maybe two/three years, visit those projects I am sure they will be doing very well unlike what we see with some of the projects that we have implemented before' - FGD, CADECOM Mzuzu staff, Malawi.*

Increased sustainability was described in relation to the AACES program in Malawi which had finished twelve months ago. Communities had established plans and visions beyond CADECOM's exit as described by a CADECOM staff member:

*'The AACES Program has phased out, but the community action plans are up to maybe 2030. In the past, if you phase out maybe everything has stopped' - FGD, CADECOM Mzuzu staff, Malawi.*

## **DIFFERENCE IN CHANGE - SBAs strengthen citizen-led development compared to other approaches which foster passive communities**

Communities and government extension officers valued SBA projects and contrasted it to other projects characterised by handouts, lack of engagement or irrelevance. The following quotes capture this sentiment:

*'...they [community] had no trouble at all understanding the [SBA] thinking...previous to that whenever myself or other representatives would visit a community you could almost guarantee... they would take the opportunity to outline needs and "we are very poor, and we need you to help us with this". But this didn't happen in that exercise and it hasn't happened in any of the communities that we have been working in and I mean it is really liberating that people have abandoned that needs based approach'* - KII, CA staff, Australia.

*'...[this is] unlike other projects, where all materials are brought in'* - FGD, government extension officers, Dowa, Malawi.

*'Yes, Caritas took us on a journey. Other organisations give us things and sometimes we don't know how to use them'* - FGD, community member, Gokwe, Zimbabwe.

*'In the past, people came and [we] weren't part of project decisions - now we are'* - FGD, community member, Gokwe, Zimbabwe.

*'Before AACES we would just wait for the government to give whatever they feel like, but now we call them. For example, If we need vaccinations for livestock we call the government to do'* - KII, community animators, Dowa, Malawi.

*'Before there was no relationship. The government officers decided where they would go and at their own pace. Now with AACES, we know the different departments (agriculture, health, etc.) and we can go and get services from them.'* - FGD, community member, Dowa, Malawi.

*'If another organisation came we would want the organisation to understand what we want. They shouldn't bring what we don't want. They have to respect us'* - KII, community animator, Dowa, Malawi.

*'They should not come to give handouts but help us to do things on our own'* - KII, community member, Gokwe, Zimbabwe.

*'The partner that is coming should not just do things, they should ask what the community wants – and following the ranking (of priorities, they) should not choose number 5 (they should choose from priorities 1,2,3)'* - KII, Parish animators, Gokwe, Zimbabwe.

## 4 Lessons learned / recommendations

This section responds to the research question: *Informed by the research findings, what are the key recommendations to CA (ALA) that will inform the ongoing implementation of SBAs?*

The recommendations outlined below are intended to be practical, feasible and directed primarily to CA. The recommendations will also be relevant to CADECOM / Caritas Gokwe and Hwange, and may apply to practice beyond the research sites.

Key conditions that support SBAs are discussed:

1. Institutional and organisational practices must be in place as a foundation to support SBAs. For example: regular SBA training supported by monitoring to ensure uptake; flexible, action-based planning; and relatively short planning cycles within longer three to five-year program commitments are important conditions to support SBAs. Also, an integrated development approach (i.e. not limited to individual sectors) such as CA's approach ensures that programming is agile and responsive to community priorities, which reinforces SBAs.
2. Ongoing staff development should be resourced to support quality practice and outcomes through SBAs. SBAs are not simply the practice of a set of tools, but encapsulates a worldview and sense of self (i.e. development practitioner) and others (i.e. community and local stakeholders). Opportunity for reflection, working as teams, oversight and coordination contribute to the accountability, quality and ongoing evolution of the strengths perspective.
3. Key local government stakeholders should be included as counterparts to SBAs, to encourage champions of this approach and increase sustainability of SBAs. This will promote extension officers to continue development work and sustain the agenda of SBAs when externally funded projects finish.

Recommendations for practices of SBAs include:

4. CA or CADECOM articulate the complementarity of rights and strengths-based perspectives within SBAs, and training is provided for staff on this perspective.<sup>37</sup> Development of theoretical foundations and practical application of linkages of SBAs and a rights-based approach would make a valuable contribution to the sector and to achieving development outcomes.
5. Recognising the inter-linkages and reinforcing nature of changes across multiple dimensions (e.g. attitudinal, relational and tangible) as revealed through this research, there is a need to ensure that all such changes are valued within project theories of change and measured within M&E systems to assess progress and demonstrate impact.<sup>38</sup>
6. Recognise and value a network approach (i.e. unplanned sharing and influence of SBAs beyond expected program boundaries) to extend impact of SBAs beyond an initial investment. This should be tracked via M&E. Having a broader perspective beyond project boundaries reinforces outcomes achieved through SBAs and sustains the practice of SBAs within local areas.
7. Advocate for the practice of SBAs at local and national levels of government to harmonise SBAs with government development agendas and approaches. Consistent development approaches offer the potential for stronger development outcomes.
8. Conduct further research and M&E to investigate views expressed during the research, that outcomes generated through SBAs are more likely sustained by communities. An evidence

---

<sup>37</sup> Winterford (2013) described similar findings

<sup>38</sup> The M&E reports reviewed as part of this research highlighted a focus on tangible outcomes.

base on sustainability of projects informed by SBAs would provide important value to ongoing learning of SBAs.

9. Recognising that views expressed about SBAs were uniformly favourable by all stakeholder groups across all research sites, it is recommended that ongoing implementation of SBAs continues.

## 5 Conclusions

Across all stakeholder groups and research sites, there was an overwhelming enthusiasm for the practice of SBAs and appreciation of the outcomes achieved.

CADECOM / Caritas Gokwe and Hwange staff and community members noted the difference between SBAs and other development approaches and described a strong preference for strengths-based practice. Many research participants have become strong advocates of SBAs as an approach to support development. The majority of staff interviewed in the research, reported it would be (or was) very difficult for them to work with other approaches.

The research revealed consistency of practice of SBAs. The relatively uniform practice was described across all the stakeholder groups; in different country locations and in different projects. Similar practice was described in projects being implemented for more than five years and others for less than twelve months.

The incorporation of the rights-based approach was evident in all research sites but notably in Malawi where it was explicitly referred to as a locally-led adaptation to usual SBA practice. The use of the rights-based approach was a contributing factor to the positive change in attitudes, relationships and tangible outcomes for the community.

SBAs contribute to a range of interlinked and reinforcing changes. The research found changes unique to each stakeholder but complementary across all. Within the dimensions of change defined for this research (attitudinal; relational and tangible) a broad set of changes were described at individual, community and organisational levels highlighting the varied outcomes achieved through SBAs.

Participants of this research described how SBAs increased community ownership, sustainability and citizen-led development compared to other approaches. SBAs provided the foundation for communities to build on their existing strengths, define their vision and goal, and then advocate to government for their rights as a way to achieve their local priorities.

The shared goal and vision of the community, and motivation which flowed from identifying and using assets, provided the foundation for community development. A sense of unity was strengthened which informed collective action and coalesced other stakeholders (including CADECOM / Caritas Gokwe and Hwange and government officers) to work towards the community goals. Community unity, ownership and engagement have made the work of local leaders, government extension officers and CADECOM / Caritas Gokwe and Hwange staff easier and more productive. As a result of SBAs, the nature and productivity of relationships between community members and government staff has improved.

This research has highlighted that SBAs are not just a set of tools that a development practitioner implements, but instead encapsulates a worldview of self and others, and frames a view of communities at the centre with strengths, assets and opportunities. Other stakeholders then work towards supporting the community vision and work of the community. Enthused with this view of the world and by seeing real and practical benefits, CADECOM / Caritas Gokwe and Hwange staff, community leaders, and government representatives have become champions of SBAs and are spreading the approach to others.

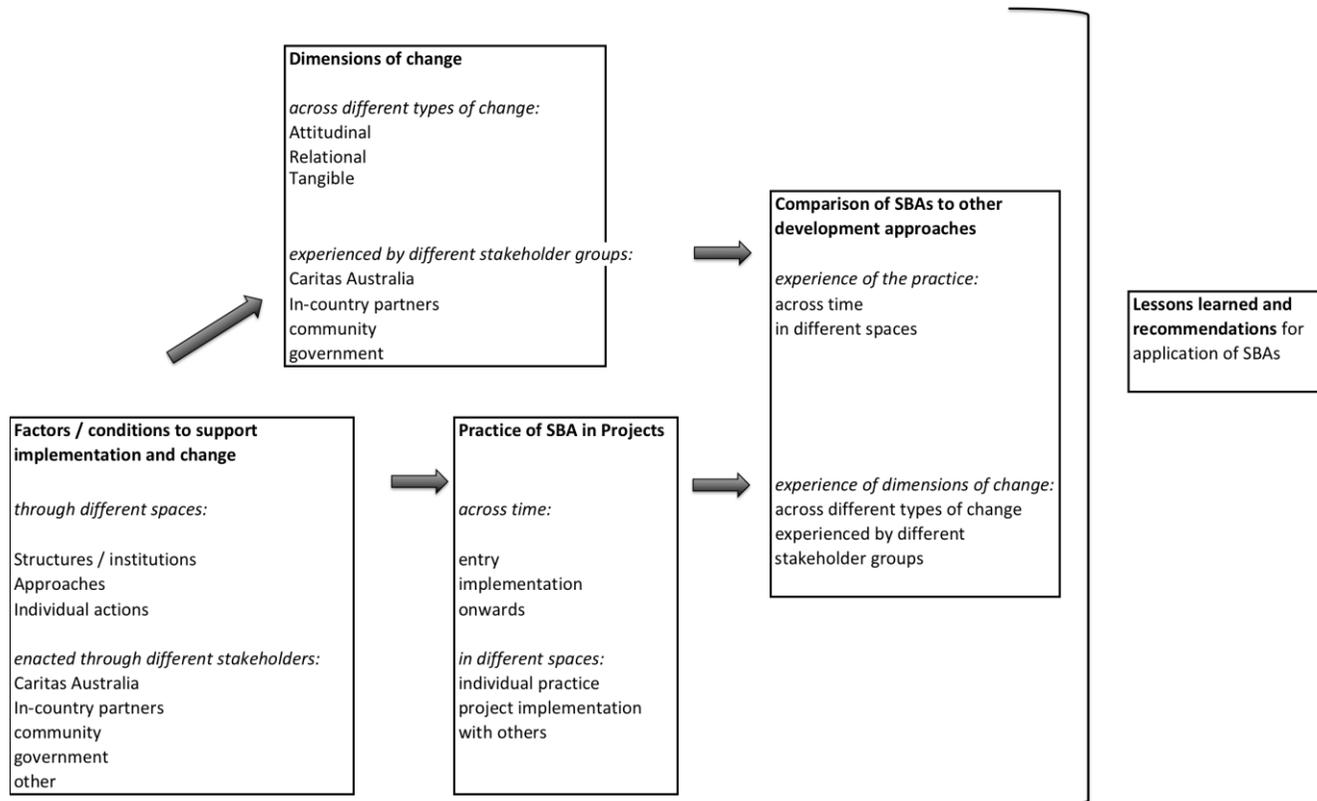
## 6 References

- Caritas Australia 2015, *Caritas Australia - 3 Year Project design Document - Caritas Diocese of Gokwe*.
- Caritas Hwange 2015, *Caritas Hwange - Annual Report 2015-2016*.
- Chivhinge, A. 2016, *Caritas Gokwe - Integrated Community Development Program (ICDP) - Mid term assessment report*.
- Dureau, C. & Wanjohi, M. 2014, *Africa Integrated Community Development Project - AACES Mid-Term Review*, Caritas Australia.
- Eliasov, N. 2014, *Asset Based Community Driven Development (ABCD): Capacity – Building Process with Caritas Gokwe, Zimbabwe*.
- Last, J. (ed.) 2010, *A Dictionary of Epidemiology*, 5th edn, Oxford University Press, viewed 2 July 2017, <<http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780195314496.001.0001/acref-9780195314496>>.
- Mathie, A. & Peters, B. 2014, 'Joint (ad)ventures and (in)credible journeys evaluating innovation: asset-based community development in Ethiopia', *Development in Practice*, vol. 24, no. 3, pp. 405–419.
- Peters, B. & Eliasov, N. 2014, *Participant Manual - Asset Based Community Development*.
- Wanjohi, M., Lim, S., Martin, S. & Mazinga, M. 2016, *Australia Africa Community Engagement Scheme (AACES) - Integrated Community Development Project - Final Review*, Caritas Australia.
- White, S.C. 2010, 'Analysing wellbeing: a framework for development practice', *Development in Practice*, vol. 20, no. 2, pp. 158–72.
- Winterford, K. 2013, 'A strengths perspective on social accountability: informing citizen and state action for improved services and development'.

## Appendix A: Analytical Framework

As set out in the Figure below, there are five parts of the analytical framework which were used to frame the research inquiry.

1. *Factors / conditions to support implementation of SBAs and changes resulting*
2. *Practice of SBAs*
3. *Dimensions of change*
4. *Comparison of different development approaches*
5. *Lessons learned / recommendations.*



## Appendix B: De-identified Participants and activities

Date	Country	Location	Activity	Question set	Number / nature of participants	Notes
Monday 22 <sup>nd</sup> May	Malawi	Mzuzu	FGD	FGD	15 female community members/leaders	Village name: Maruluba, Kazuni
	Malawi	Mzuzu	FGD	FGD	15 male community members/leaders	Village name: Maruluba, Kazuni
Tuesday, 23 May 2017	Malawi	Mzuzu	FGD	KII	4 government extension officers	Village name: Rumphu, Mzuzu,
	Malawi	Mzuzu	FGD	FGD	5 CADECOM Mzuzu staff	
	Malawi	Mzuzu	KII	KII	1 CADECOM Mzuzu staff	
Wednesday, 24 May 2017	Malawi	Lilongwe (Dowa)	KII	KII	2 CADECOM Dowa staff	-
	Malawi	Lilongwe (Dowa)	KII	KII	1 CADECOM Mzuzu staff	-
	Malawi	n/a, car discussion	KII	Non-structured KII	1 CADECOM Malawi staff	-
Thursday, 25 May 2017	Malawi	Dowa	FGD	FGD	22 male and 39 female community members/leaders	Village name: Nakumba
	Malawi	Dowa	KII	KII	2 female community animators	Village name: Nakumba
	Malawi	Dowa	KII	KII	2 male community animators	Village name: Nakumba
Friday, 26 May 2017	Malawi	Dowa	FGD	FGD	1 AGRITEX coordinator 3 extension officers	-
	Malawi	Dowa	KII	KII	1 extension officer	-
	Malawi	Lilongwe	KII	KII / unstructured	1 CADECOM Malawi staff	-
Sunday, 28 May 2017	Zimbabwe	Gokwe, car discussion	KII	unstructured	1 Caritas Gokwe staff	-

Date	Country	Location	Activity	Question set	Number / nature of participants	Notes
Monday, 29 May 2017	Zimbabwe	Gokwe	FGD	FGD	17 female Gokwe community members / leaders	Participants from a mix of villages: Mugauri (8), Chakwanta (8) Manyuli (1)
	Zimbabwe	Gokwe	FGD	FGD	10 male Gokwe community members/leaders	Participants from a mix of villages: Mugauri (2), Chakwanta (2) Nenyunga (5) Manyuli (5)
	Zimbabwe	Gokwe	KII	KII	1 extension officer	-
	Zimbabwe	Gokwe, car discussion	KII	unstructured	1 Caritas Gokwe staff	-
Tuesday, 30 May 2017	Zimbabwe	Gokwe	KII	KII	1 female Gokwe community member	Village name: Mugauri
	Zimbabwe	Gokwe	KII	KII	1 male Gokwe community member	Village name: Mugauri
	Zimbabwe	Gokwe	KII	KII	2 male, Gokwe parish animators	Parish location not recorded
	Zimbabwe	Gokwe	KII	KII	1 female government officer (protection)	-
	Zimbabwe	Gokwe	KII	KII	1 Caritas Gokwe staff	-
Wednesday, 31 May 2017	Zimbabwe	Gokwe/Hwange, car discussion	KII	KII	1 Caritas Gokwe staff	-
Thursday, 1 June 2017	Zimbabwe	Hwange	KII	unstructured	3 Caritas Hwange staff	-
	Zimbabwe	Hwange, car discussion	KII	unstructured	1 Caritas Hwange staff	-
	Zimbabwe	Hwange	FGD	FGD	41 female Hwange community members	Village name: Simangani

Date	Country	Location	Activity	Question set	Number / nature of participants	Notes
	Zimbabwe	Hwange	FGD	FGD	20 male Hwange community members (PLWD)	Village name: Simangani
Friday, 2 June 2017	Zimbabwe	Hwange, car discussion	KII	KII	1 Caritas Hwange staff	-
	Zimbabwe	Hwange, car discussion	KII	KII	1 Hwange community leader	Village name: Lupote
	Zimbabwe	Hwange	KII	KII	1 male Hwange council (government) member, also community member	Village name: Lupote
	Zimbabwe	Hwange	KII	KII	1 male Hwange community leader	Village name: Lupote
	Zimbabwe	Hwange	KII	KII	3 male & 1 female Hwange Parish animators	Village name: Lupote, 1 animator was also village headman
	Zimbabwe	Hwange	KII	KII	1 male government extension officer	Village name: Lupote
	Zimbabwe	Hwange	KII	KII / unstructured	1 Caritas Hwange staff	-
Saturday, 3 June 2017	Zimbabwe	Hwange, car discussion	KII	KII	1 Caritas Hwange staff	-
Thursday, 7th September 2017	Australia	Caritas Australia Offices	KII	KII modified for staff	4 Caritas Australia staff	-
Friday, 9th September 2017	Australia	Skype	KII	KII modified for staff	1 Caritas Australia staff	-



Institute for  
Sustainable  
Futures



**Caritas**  
AUSTRALIA

