

PRISCILLA'S STORY

ZIMBABWE



[Watch Priscilla's Story](#)



Priscilla holds millet from this year's harvest in her storeroom at her home in Hwange district, north-western Zimbabwe. Photo: Richard Wainwright/Caritas Australia

Priscilla (59) lives with her husband Charles (68) and two of their grandchildren, Obry (8) and Jayden (7), in the Hwange region, in north-western Zimbabwe. Climate change is presenting unprecedented challenges for people living in the most vulnerable and remote communities in Zimbabwe.

In Hwange, the impacts of climate change can be seen in the unpredictable rainfall patterns, prolonged dry spells, poor agricultural soils and high temperatures in the region. Food insecurity is increasing and farming as a form of income is becoming even harder. Many are at risk of extreme hunger.

"There's also the issue of the children failing to go to school because of the shortage of food. So, you have women and girls in particular, spending most of their time going out to look for food in order to feed their families," Super Dube, Diocesan Coordinator for Caritas Hwange said.

Zimbabwe struggles with widespread poverty and political instability. More than half of Zimbabwe's population, 7.9 million people, live in extreme poverty¹, of which nearly 90% reside in rural areas. During times of intense drought and food shortages, Priscilla had to commute to the town centre and wait in long queues to collect food.

"It was stressful because we didn't know what to give our children because there was nothing to give them," Priscilla said. "The challenges we faced included walking long distances to fetch water from the borehole so that we can water our gardens, bathe, wash our clothes and utensils."

In 2019, Priscilla joined the Zimbabwe Integrated Community Development Program, implemented by partner Caritas Hwange and funded by Caritas Australia.

¹[World Bank](#)

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Through the program, Priscilla and her community learnt conservation farming techniques to grow drought-resistant crops to help mitigate the effects of climate change. Priscilla was able to produce a bumper harvest in her first year of practicing in conservation farming!

“Our biggest challenge as a family was mainly food insecurity due to the farming method we used. We would use an ox-drawn hoe, and this resulted in different germination rates of our crops,” Priscilla said. “However, Caritas Hwange came in with the idea of implementing Gachompo (conservation farming), which tremendously improved our crop germination rates hence the yields. The introduction of Gachompo also meant reduced use of livestock for farming and more time for them to graze.”

With her new-found knowledge, Priscilla helped train and support other farmers in her community to learn techniques to produce better yields too.

“We are very happy to have been introduced to conservation farming. Even for those who have no knowledge of it, we try to assist them. That’s why we work in groups,” Priscilla said.

Priscilla used the funds from her harvest to start poultry farming. She sells eggs to pay for her grandchildren’s school fees, books and stationery. The poultry farming also provides a safety net for Priscilla and her family during times of hardship, like the current drought.

In addition to conservation farming training, Caritas Hwange has helped Priscilla and her community boost their food security through a range of activities. These include participating in a community nutrition garden to grow and sell vegetables and rehabilitating the cattle dip tanks to keep their cows healthy and reduce the prevalence of tick-borne diseases. Cows are precious commodities in Zimbabwe, as they can be sold during times of crisis for funds to purchase food. Caritas Hwange also rehabilitated a community dam near Priscilla’s house, so cattle can have access to water all year.

The work of Caritas Hwange means that Priscilla has the techniques, tools and resources she needs to build resilience and support her family during this current food crisis.

“We are indeed grateful to Caritas Hwange for the knowledge,” Priscilla said. “Today we have knowledge and skills that we didn’t have before and are able to use to earn a living.”



Photo: Richard Wainwright/
Caritas Australia

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TASK 1: Discussion

- A. What were some of the challenges faced by Priscilla and others in the Hwange region?

- B. Explain how Caritas Australia and their partners in Zimbabwe have helped Priscilla and her community deal with the effects of climate change.

- C. How has your support of Caritas Australia enabled Priscilla to change her life?

- D. Which Catholic Social Teachings do you see reflected in Priscilla's story?

- E. What have you learnt about the relationship between climate change and poverty?

TASK 2: Observing Weather Patterns

Climate change has meant that for parts of the world like Zimbabwe, rainfall, periods of drought and temperatures have become hard to predict. This can result in poor agricultural soils, damage or loss of crops and impaired access to fresh water for both communities and their livestock.

Create a weather observation chart and, for a week, chart the weather in your local area. You may be able to complete your observations based on what you can see; for others, you can gather your data from [weather websites](#).

In a table, mark the days of the week along the horizontal axis, and the following along the vertical axis:

- Temperature, Humidity, Clouds, Wind, Precipitation, Air pressure

What patterns, if any, have you been able to observe?

1. If the same weather patterns continued as they appear in your chart for another year, what impact do you think they would have on Australian farmers?

TASK 3: Conservation Gardening

Through the Integrated Community Development Program, implemented by partner Caritas Hwange and funded by Caritas Australia, Priscilla and her community learnt conservation farming techniques to grow drought-resistant crops to help mitigate the effects of climate change.

1. Summarise the principles of conservation agriculture using the following [link](#).
2. Research the ways we can use conservation techniques in our own home gardens (such as types of soils to use, water conservation methods, etc.) and create a poster that highlights these methods. You can use an online design tool such as [CANVA](#) to help you create it.

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A CATHOLIC WORLDVIEW

“Everything is connected. Concern for the environment thus needs to be joined to a sincere love for our fellow human beings and an unwavering commitment to resolving the problems of society.”

Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'* n91

Explain how through addressing issues surrounding climate change in Priscilla's story, we are showing a "sincere love for our fellow human beings"?

[Mark 4:1-9](#)

Read the above scripture passage.

1. What do you think are the key messages of the parable?
2. Like the seeds that were able to grow and flourish on good soil, what small thing can you do this week that can make a difference to the larger issues of climate change or poverty? Write this down as a pledge below.