



ActionAid Zimbabwe

NEWSLETTER

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- **InFocus: ActionAid Zimbabwe's Local Rights Program**

THE COUNTRY DIRECTOR'S WELCOME REMARKS

Joy Mabenge, ActionAid Zimbabwe Country
Director.



Welcome to the third edition of our bi-monthly newsletter, where we focus on the impactful work of our Local Rights Programs (LRPs). Through child sponsorship, the LRPs provide ActionAid Zimbabwe with a unique opportunity to closely collaborate with various communities on development projects. These projects include water supply initiatives, classroom block construction, staff cottages, and support for women's rights, child protection, climate justice, and movement building.

I am proud to report that our initiatives have made significant strides in the communities we serve. ActionAid Zimbabwe operates in 9 out of the 10 provinces, covering 22 districts. Strategically, we have established our LRP work as the cornerstone of our initiatives, using a layering approach in each district. This approach ensures that the long-term LRP work, which typically spans around 10 years (or slightly longer, depending on community circumstances), serves as the foundation for all other initiatives.

Currently, we are managing 9 LRPs, with Hwedza, Nyanga, and Nkayi set to be fully phased out by December 2025. Chendambuya and Saunyama will follow by December 2026, and Nyazura by 2027. By 2027, ActionAid Zimbabwe will focus on LRPs in Binga, Lusulu, Chipinge, and Mbire, targeting

over 12,000 links in these 4 LRPs—an increase from the current 9,000 links in 9 LRPs. This shift allows us to deepen our impact and concentrate resources in areas with existing LRPs, avoiding the dilution of our efforts.

The decision to establish a new LRP in Mbire comes as we phase out operations in Nkayi, Hwedza, and Chendambuya. In Mbire, we are already implementing the Strategic Partnerships Agreement II (SPAII) project in collaboration with Fambidzanai. Mbire was chosen due to the significant successes achieved and the valuable infrastructure established under the Zimbabwe Resilience Building Fund and the Zimbabwe Agriculture Growth Project, where crop and livestock innovation centers were set up. I believe that, together with our agroecology work with Fambidzanai, these centers will be transformative for the Mbire community.

This is the direction we will pursue moving forward, and I hope you will join us on this journey as we support girls, women, youth, activists, and farmers. Through partnerships with government, community-based organizations, civil society, media, and other development partners, we will continue to fight poverty in Zimbabwe.

Happy reading!

SEVEN YEARS LATER AT NJOBOLA PRIMARY SCHOOL

It's a typical day at Njobola Primary School.

The lunch bell rings, and a small group of girls and boys quickly gather at the assembly point, singing a few songs before dispersing in all directions to head home. Meanwhile, older students chat in smaller groups, their conversations filling the corners of the school grounds. When the bell rings again, everyone returns to their classrooms, and learning continues for the senior grades.

Though the scene may seem familiar, the script is vastly different from 2015, before ActionAid Zimbabwe partnered with Basilwizi under the Local Rights Program to construct four classroom blocks and staff cottages at Njobola. Back then, the school was in a dire state, with lessons taking place in grass-thatched temporary structures that left students exposed to weather elements, making learning a struggle. Teachers had to live in surrounding communities, and those fortunate enough to live near the school were packed into small rooms built by community members.

It was a challenging environment for both learners and teachers.

Today, the story is different. The pass rate at Njobola has gradually risen from a mere 3% to about 22%, a remarkable improvement largely attributed to the construction of the classroom blocks and staff cottages. These developments have significantly enhanced the learning environment and improved education outcomes at the school.

Stella, now a 6th grader, was in ECD A when the school was being constructed, and she vividly remembers the conditions before ActionAid Zimbabwe's intervention.

"We learned in what looked like shacks. Even then, there weren't enough, so some of us had to learn outside," she recalls. While the establishment of Njobola as a satellite school meant she no longer had to walk long distances to school, she is even more excited about the improvements she has witnessed over the years.



“Classrooms make learning easier for us. We can use chalkboards, stick charts on the walls, and we have good storage facilities for our learning materials, unlike back then when things were difficult,” Stella shares. “We are now safe from bad weather. During winter and the rainy season, learning still goes on.”

Mr. Tlou, the school head, expresses his gratitude for the investment by ActionAid Zimbabwe and Basilwizi, noting that it has opened the door for additional support to the school.

“I joined the school soon after the construction of the classroom blocks. Since then, we’ve seen other well-wishers coming in to support us with learning materials, a borehole, a school garden, and latrine facilities with handwashing stations,” says Mr. Tlou.



NEW LOCAL RIGHTS PROGRAM SET TO TRANSFORM MBIRE DISTRICT

ActionAid Zimbabwe has recently launched a new Local Rights Program (LRP) in Mbire, aimed at implementing a range of developmental initiatives to combat poverty, promote social inclusion, and fight inequality in the district. Funded by ActionAid UK and ActionAid Italy, the Mbire LRP is set to begin operations in January 2025.

Peter Matimati, ActionAid Zimbabwe’s LRP & Partnership Manager who is also responsible for Child Sponsorship, stated that based on the context and operating environment, the LRP can exist for at least 10 years in one community which can be defined by the number of wards in a particular district. Initial assessments by ActionAid Zimbabwe have highlighted significant gaps in health, education, child protection, livelihoods, and water and sanitation in the area.

Mbire District, located in the Zambezi Valley approximately 200km north of Harare, is not unfamiliar with ActionAid Zimbabwe’s efforts. The district has previously benefitted from the Zimbabwe Agriculture Growth Project, the Zimbabwe Resilience Building Fund Project, and currently, the Strategic Partnerships Agreement Project, which is being implemented in partnership with Fambidzanai.

Despite the challenges outlined in the 2023 ZIMVAC report, ActionAid Zimbabwe Country Director, Joy Mabenge, is confident in the organization’s ability to uplift the Mbire community.

“This is not our first time working in Mbire. Through our Child Sponsorship program and other funding mechanisms, we are committed to giving our all to support the community here. We have successfully uplifted other communities facing even harsher circumstances than Mbire, and I believe we can do the same here,” said Joy Mabenge, addressing community members in Mbire during community engagement meetings which are crucial for the LRP start up.

YOUNG PEOPLE IN BINGA RESIST RELOCATIONS

In Binga, reports of relocation stirs painful memories among the Tonga people, who are still not happy with their forced move from the Zambezi River banks for the Kariba Dam's construction decades ago.

Now, with the Gwayi-Shangani Dam nearing completion, at least 502 families from the Lubimbi area are slated for relocation to Nakanono. The dam project includes a 245-kilometer water pipeline from Gwayi-Shangani to Bulawayo, affecting hundreds of families in the process.

Witness Munenge, a member of the Lubimbi community, is among the young people resisting the relocation plan. They argue that their relocation should be to a location closer to the dam, which would allow them to capitalize on the economic

opportunities that the dam is expected to bring.

"We are pleased with the construction of the dam," Munenge says, "but we are unhappy with how the government is handling the relocation process."

Despite their concerns, the government's response has been dismissive. A WhatsApp conversation between the youth and a government official, which we viewed, contains messages suggesting that the young people should be grateful for the development.

The resistance from the youth, while heartfelt, faces a number of obstacles. Historically, the government has often proceeded with large-scale projects without sufficient community consultation, a pattern that continues with the current situation in Lubimbi.

"I NOW LOOK FORWARD TO GOING TO SCHOOL EVERYDAY"



Christabel, one of the 402 learners at Holy Spirit Primary School in Ruzane Ward, Hwedza, beamed with joy as she enjoyed her lunch at school. The meal, consisting of Sadza and vegetables, came from the school's nutrition garden, supported by ActionAid Zimbabwe.

Ruzane Primary School is among four schools that have benefited from borehole construction and nutrition gardens as part of ActionAid Zimbabwe's Local Rights Program (LRP).

"I now look forward to going to school every day," Christabel said, gazing directly at us. "The meal we receive every day helps us stay in school despite hunger. I used to miss school a lot, but since the feeding program started, I no longer miss school because of hunger."

The persistent droughts affecting Zimbabwe have severely impacted food security and household income, especially in rural areas that rely on agriculture. Hwedza is a climate hotspot, facing frequent droughts and rising temperatures, leading to dried-up rivers and acute hunger. Families,

dependent on agriculture, often struggle to afford school fees, leaving children hungry during lessons and unable to concentrate, which affects attendance and, in some cases, enrollment.

ActionAid Zimbabwe addressed this issue by drilling a borehole at Holy Spirit Primary School and three other schools in the LRP. They also established a one-hectare nutrition garden, provided fencing material, and offered a \$200 startup grant. The school revived its feeding program, providing learners with hot meals and improving school attendance.

The project employed an integrated approach to farming, with community members and the school working together to grow vegetables for the feeding program. Surplus vegetables are sold, with the proceeds supporting the feeding program. The garden has been so successful that it was selected as a model garden by the local education authority, attracting additional projects, such as piggery, from other organizations. The school's new feeding program, supported by ActionAid's borehole and garden, has significantly alleviated these issues.



UNPAID CARE WORK, WHY SHOULD MEN CARE?

Munyaradzi, a farmer and dedicated family man with three children, including one with a disability who attends a special school in Harare, is a living example of a gender activist hero. Despite the traditional belief that unpaid care work is solely a woman's responsibility, Munyaradzi has defied these norms and embraced his role in household chores.



“I was sceptical at first and afraid of what the society would label me if I helped out my wife with the household chores”

“We need to rewrite the narrative and tell the world there nothing wrong with helping around the home.”

Unpaid care work, which involves tasks like fetching water, cooking, and cleaning, has traditionally fallen on the shoulders of women and girls. Munyaradzi's family used to walk long distances daily to collect water and firewood, with his wife often carrying a baby on her back while he spent time at local shops with other men. Additionally, his wife managed all household chores and cared for their son with a disability.

“My time was mostly spent at the shops with other men,” Munyaradzi recalls.

His perspective changed after attending a capacity-building training organized by ActionAid Zimbabwe and the Rural Women's Assembly (RWA). The training, which focused on unpaid care work, time diaries, gender mainstreaming, and Gender Transformative Public Services (GTPS), along with community discussions on sharing care

work and challenging gender stereotypes, was transformative.

“This training and community engagement opened my eyes,” Munyaradzi says. “I realized the importance of sharing care responsibilities and challenging gender stereotypes.”

Since then, Munyaradzi has actively supported women's empowerment in his community. He successfully advocated for the installation of two community boreholes to reduce the burden of fetching water, and he even dug a well at home to ease water collection.

Munyaradzi is also mobilizing other men to participate in ActionAid Zimbabwe's community discussions and promoting the importance of men taking on unpaid care work.

A recent study by Sonke Justice and SAFAIDS reveals that women and girls in Zimbabwe are responsible for most unpaid care work, with 44 to 56 percent of men never participating in these tasks. Men often engage in care work only as a last resort, when their spouses are ill or otherwise occupied.



BEE KEEPING PROJECT EMPOWERS WOMEN IN THE FACE OF CLIMATE CHANGE

“Because of our culture, in which the patriarchal system is dominant, it is difficult for women to attain higher levels of education which allows one to be independent. Hence, women depend on men or their husbands economically and even for representation in social circles. Now that I am trained, I have seen that it is possible for women to gain recognition and to represent themselves. I have been equipped with knowledge on bee keeping and honey production and I now know how to make a beehive. This knowledge and skills are important to help me diversify my sources of income. I am happy because a lot of women were trained, this helps us to have a network of women which we can use as a safety net and also for knowledge sharing. Equipping women is very critical because they are also the ones who mostly fend for the family.” Elizabeth, one of the training participants.



Demonstration of how to use a smoker when approaching a bee hive



Women finalizing the Kenyan Bee Hive



Elizabeth (holding a plank) during practicals - making of the Kenyan Bee Hive



Materials used during the training (smoker, wax, honey combs, bursh, knife and bee suit glooves)



Women during the practicals-making a Kenyan Bar Bee Hive



Women showing the completed Kenyan Bar Bee Hive



Women participating in the demonstrration of wax making using honey combs

RESTORING THE DIGNITY OF ADOLESCENT GIRLS IN RURAL SCHOOLS



Period poverty remains a significant issue for girls in Zimbabwe, particularly in rural areas. Many girls face challenges in accessing dignified sanitary wear due to high costs, often resorting to unhygienic alternatives that pose health risks. This lack of access leads to frequent absences from school—approximately four days each month, adding up to over 40 days of missed learning annually—resulting in poor academic performance.

In response, ActionAid Zimbabwe, in partnership with the Zimbabwe Family Planning Council, distributed 500 dignity kits to selected secondary schools within the Chendambuya Local Rights Program (LRP). Each kit included sanitary pads, bath soap, laundry soap, towels, toothpaste, toothbrushes, and buckets. This initiative has significantly alleviated period poverty for many rural girls.

“I was excited to receive this kit from ActionAid Zimbabwe,” said Bianca, a participant in the Child Sponsorship program. “It’s wonderful that many girls in need have received support, especially with sanitary pads. Many girls struggle during their

periods and sometimes miss school. This donation will undoubtedly improve their school attendance.”

Mrs. Nyamukondiwa, a teacher working closely with adolescent girls, noted, “Menstrual periods can be challenging for young girls. Without proper menstrual pads, they often face ridicule from peers and may miss school for over five days. Seeing rural girls receive such assistance brings me great joy.”

Tinashe Sapoti, 16, shared, “Before receiving these dignity kits, some girls had to use rags during their periods, which was very uncomfortable and increased the risk of infections. The inclusion of soaps, towels, and a bucket in the kits has greatly improved our menstrual hygiene at school.”

Zimbabwe’s ongoing economic crisis, marked by high inflation, unemployment, and increased household poverty—exacerbated by drought effects—has worsened period poverty. With families struggling to afford basic necessities, including food, there is an urgent need for resources to provide sanitary materials and hygiene education to girls and young women across the country.

UNDERSTANDING CHILD SPONSORSHIP WITHIN ACTIONAID

Child Sponsorship is a fundraising mechanism for ActionAid federation, which facilitates a link between an individual supporter and a child. Through a process of fundraising, ActionAid raises funds which are called Regular Giving, from individual Volunteers. ActionAid Zimbabwe is a beneficiary of this fund, which is raised mainly from:

- A. Individuals
- B. Companies
- C. Organizations
- D. Trusts
- E. Foundations

The following are the funding Affiliates supporting Child Sponsorship for ActionAid Zimbabwe:

- UK
- Italy
- Greece
- Sweden

The funds mainly support communities in defined areas known as Local Rights Programme (LRPs). Currently there are nine (9) LRPs in Zimbabwe.

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