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ActionAid Zimbabwe

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# Scaling Up Agroecology To Fight The Effects of Climate Change



## Joy Mabenge (ActionAid Zimbabwe Country Director)



I welcome you to the November issue of our ActionAid Zimbabwe (AAZ) newsletter. This month our focus is on Programme Priority Three (3) of our Country Strategy whose thrust is to 'Empower communities and women, targeting young women living in poverty and exclusion to secure their rights to land and natural resources for improved livelihoods and sustainable agriculture, as well as advocating for climate justice.'



As we enter the 2020-21 farming season, the forecast of above average rainfall is encouraging especially coming against a background of three successive drought years which increased food insecurity and adversely affected livelihoods.

Pursuant to our objectives to eradicate poverty and food insecurity, our programming has sought to build resilience of small-medium scale farmers and communities to withstand pressures and shocks caused by climate change. We have done this by advocating for the adoption of agroecological practices, improving productivity and facilitating access to viable markets. This is complementing government efforts especially on its conservation agriculture program/pfumvudza/itwasa.

AAZ is taking a stand in advocating for the adoption of climate resilient agricultural practices and formulation of policies that foster climate justice. Our policy work under this priority has seen us developing robust advocacy strategies, position papers and policy briefs for the creation of an enabling regulatory environment.

The world continues to grapple with the COVID-19 pandemic, as a second wave sets in. AAZ's agility in these trying times has seen us adapting our programming to the 'new normal' where we have thrived to safeguard the gains of our work in improving livelihoods and creating sustainable agricultural value chains. Working together with private sector players and the government, we continue to fight poverty,



**Synoria Mambure of Mbire in her field where she is practising agroecology such as zero tillage which conserves the soil. Below some small grain seed from a seed bank for women farmers from Masvingo as part of seed retention practices. These seeds were displayed during a look and learn visit in Shashe, Masvingo.**



climate injustice and food insecurity by embracing virtual platforms which has provided us with an opportunity to reach out to a bigger and diverse audience.

It is my sincere hope that you will find this issue informative and entertaining as we take a deep dive into highlights of our work under Programme Priority Three.

## Scaling Up Agroecology to Fight The Effects Of Climate Change

ActionAid and partner staff who completed an agroecology training recently



AAZ in association with Fambidzanai Permaculture Centre hosted an agroecology training for agricultural extension workers and ActionAid Local Rights Programme (LRP) officers in November 2020. The training was aimed at providing an overview of agroecology and other farming systems and demonstrating how principles of agroecology can be applied by smallholder farmers in a bid to fight poverty and the effects of climate change.

Practicals on soil conservation, fertility management and natural pest and disease management were steered during the training whereby agricultural extension workers and ActionAid LRP officers demonstrated double digging, compost preparation,

preparation of liquid manure and preparation of a fertility trench bed. This ensures soil conservation, effective fertility management and effective natural pest and disease management during farming which are part of agroecological farming practices.

A look and learn visit to see and share experiences with farmers who have transitioned and are still transitioning from conventional /industrial agricultural to agroecology was also facilitated during the training. Water harvesting, nutrients recycling and seed banks were all showcased as means of improving productivity in a way that empowers the smallholder farmer to be more adaptable to climate change thus reducing external inputs on the farm.



**Demonstration of double digging and preparation of a fertility trench bed on agroecology and other systems by Knowledge Mahuni from Agricultural Extension Services (left) and Stephen Mukwanda from Fambidzanai Permaculture Centre**



**An unidentified agricultural extension officer from Nkayi in a seed bank as part of seed retention supported by Fambidzanai Permaculture Centre**

## Agroecology: Agriculture that works for the future

Climate change effects in Zimbabwe are being felt in every corner of Zimbabwe and this has had negative impacts on water supply, food security and livelihoods. Climate change is affecting the rural vulnerable communities more where most of our LRPs are housed. These are mostly small holder farmers who depend mostly on livestock and crop production. Agricultural production has since decreased due to recurrent droughts. ActionAid and partners have been developing and promoting Agroecology practices to strengthen adaptation strategies aimed at increasing productivity, reducing vulnerabilities and increasing the resilience of smallholder production systems. Some of the agroecology practices include use of zero tillage to promote soil conservation and use of animal manure to substitute and compliment artificial fertilizers. This leads to a healthier soil and increased yields. AAZ conducted an Agroecology Symposium under the theme “Potential of Agroecology in Poverty eradication and Mitigating climate change” in October 2020 as part of the efforts to promote the future of sustainable agriculture in Zimbabwe.



**Lead farmers and agricultural extension officers from Makoni District discussing the effects of climate change and mitigation strategies during the Agroecology Symposium**

## Synoria Mambure: Community Champion

Synoria showing off some of her harvested sorghum which is drought resistant crop as part of efforts to fight climate change



She is seen lost and detached from everybody. This follows the loss of her husband in 1997 who passed on leaving her with seven children to look after. She could not bear the thought of what she was going to do to take care of her children in the dry region of Mbire district which is characterised by droughts, floods, crop pests and disease outbreaks. Life was not easy for Synoria Mambure (65) from ward 7, Mbire District as she could not afford to give her family three decent meals a day. She could not manage to take all her seven children to school at once. Synoria and her family survived on chance as they lived in three round huts which could not protect them from floods.

Synoria tried to make a living through farming although it was on a very small scale. It was in 2016 when her full potential as a farmer was unleashed through the intervention of a programme under the Zimbabwe Resilience Building Fund (ZRBF) which is supported by the Ministry of Lands, Agriculture, Water, Climate and Rural Resettlement, the European Union, the Embassy of Sweden, the United National Development Programme and the UK Department of International Development. AAZ is the lead organisation in a consortium comprising the Zimbabwe Environmental Law Association (ZELA) and the African Breeders Services Total Cattle Management in implementing the ZRBF in the Zambezi Valley.

Synoria, now a lead farmer, grows sorghum, millet and cow peas. In the 2019 farming season she harvested one and a half tonnes of sorghum and she is selling a bag at USD 15. So far, she has sold 15 bags. She also harvested three and half bags of millet and she is selling at USD5 per bucket. Also, she harvested 5 bags and 2 buckets of cow peas and she has sold one and half buckets so far.

“I use my money to pay school fees for my children, to keep up my homestead by building infrastructure and

some of it to buy livestock so that I can increase my revenue. I improved my infrastructure by constructing an additional three roomed brick house. My eldest son graduated from Mutare Teacher’s College and he is now a teacher. Currently, I have a daughter in high school.”

Apart from small grain crops production Synoria also participate in an Internal Savings and Lending (ISAL) group, livestock production and other off farm interventions to demonstrate layering and sequencing of interventions which promote sustainable livelihoods.

About 46 other lead farmers are supported by the ZRBF in Mbire.



**Experiment at Synoria’s homestead to investigate the effects of seed bed configuration on crop productivity**



**Synoria’s preparations for the 2020/21 farming season using agroecology practices**



**Synoria's homestead now unlike the three huts she owned prior to joining ZRBF**

## Resilience efforts taken to a new level through goat breeding initiative

**Ziyabapota women group with their goats supported under the ZRBF**



Shocks and stresses like droughts, floods, crop pests and disease outbreaks were used to define Binga district. They exposed individuals particularly women to different vulnerabilities like poverty and gender-based violence. However, dynamics have changed through the intervention of the ZRBF which has enhanced community resilience.

Ziyabapota group from Ward 21 Binga district is a group supported under the ZRBF programme. This is a goat breeding group comprised of 12 members, eight females and four males. The group is spearheaded by women and has made strides in

goat breeding after they received a Matabele Buck (goat) from the ZRBF in July 2017. They managed to accumulate the goats to 165 till July 2020 when the Matabele goat passed on. They continued breeding using the first generation offspring of the Matabele goat.

Within the group are outstanding members like Thandazile Sithole who managed to acquire 35 offsprings from the Matabele goat received from ZRBF. Previously, she used to sell her goats at USD10- 15 but now she is selling the improved breeds at USD20- 25 each.



**“We learnt resilience from ZRBF, how to improve our goat breeds including building raised platforms of kennels and roofing them so that our goats can enjoy a bit of shed in our dry region of Binga,” said Thandazile.**

**“Gender based violence at household level has decreased because women now have their individual sources of income and have become independent through goat breeding initiative. Women in our community were used to men providing everything for them as they did chores at home and this was the root cause of domestic violence in many homes,” said Thandazile.**

**“As a group, in 2021 we plan to commercialize our initiative by looking for markets where we can sell our goats and we also want to change a Matabele goat with a Boer so that we further improve our breeds,” added Thandazile.**

Women in Binga district are sustaining their families and paying school fees for their children and exchanging their goats for food during drought. Thandazile and group members have purchased a grinding mill for commercial purposes with customers coming from the community. The grinding mill was purchased from 30% (USD650) of the womens’ money from ISALs. The rest which is 70% of the money came from the ZRBF support. The grinding mill is contributing to reducing costs for the goat project through local feed formulation and thereby increasing profit margins.



**A grinding mill purchased by Ziyabapota group**



## Nutrition garden brings life to young people



**Tsitsi Masungu in her community nutrition garden where they are producing maize consumed as green mealies**

In 2019, AAZ set up nutrition gardens in Nyazura LRP in Makoni District to respond to the recurrent droughts. ActionAid supported the community with borehole drilling, fencing of the garden area and garden equipment. The garden has supported 40 households in the area. Tsitsi Masungu 19, is a young farmer in the garden and has this to say:

**“I would like to thank Action Aid for supporting us with the garden which has a reliable water source. I have already planted maize which will soon be ready for consumption. I am enjoying a nutritious meal with vegetables because they have not dried up unlike in other areas where they do not have a water source. I am also making surplus by selling vegetables to other households.”**



**Some of the vegetables produced from Tsitsi's community garden**



## Empowering women to commercialise goat production

Loveness standing in front of her old goat housing and the improved goat housing provided with support from the European Union funded VALUE project



For Loveness Tonhechawa – a female goat producer based in Manicaland province’s Chipinge district, goat farming was a past time to which she gave little attention and investment. For many rural farmers, goat rearing is a tradition passed down from generation to generation with little commercial orientation.

Loveness had no knowledge on various goat production essentials such as administration of drugs and vaccines, need to provide supplementary feed and appropriate housing. She had her damascene moment when she was registered as an anchor farmer under the Value Chain Alliance for Livestock Upgrading and Empowerment (VALUE) project. An anchor farmer is a lead farmer working with a group of 10 other farmers whom they mentor and train on good husbandry practices. AAZ is the lead organisation in the VALUE which is implemented under the Zimbabwe Agricultural Growth Programme (ZAGP) with funding from the EU. The consortium members in the VALUE project are COSV and Mercy Corps which are from the Non Governmental Organisation (NGO) sector and private sector livestock players namely Shamiso and Bradford farms in the pork value chain, Michview and Zvikomborero farms in the goat value chain.

“When I was registered as a participant under this project I had little knowledge on goat farming, however we were trained on several topics which opened my eyes to the profitability of rearing goats commercially,” says Loveness.

As with most goat producers in her area, Loveness did not have appropriate goat housing infrastructure thus

inhibiting her ability to produce good quality goats. Armed with new knowledge on commercial goat farming, Loveness responded to calls for a livestock matching grant by the project with a desire to upgrade her goat housing.

“I applied for the matching grants after realising that my goat housing structures were very poor and not conducive for commercialisation, I was very delighted to be selected as one of the recipients of the grants. The project met 70% (USD400) of the total costs and I contributed the remaining 30%,” she said.

She has since completed building a modern and elevated goat housing structure which has become a local attraction.

“I am grateful for support to upgrade my goat housing, other goat producers in the area have been coming here to learn from the improvements that I have made. My goats are now accommodated in an elevated and well-ventilated pen, I also provide them with supplementary feed and clean water and the change has been noticeable.”

Loveness is working with her other group members to improve the quality of their flock through introduction of an a second generation offspring of a pure breed and indogenous breeds Boer Cross Bucks for crossing with the smaller local goat breeds.

## VALUE project championing the inclusion of women and youth in goat and pork value chains

In implementing the pork and goat value chains, the VALUE is cognisant of the structural challenges facing women and youths in the two value chains. The project is thus promoting strategic alliances with private sector integrators and Value Chain core actors to create market-based solutions to enhance performance, production, productivity, market linkages, opportunities for employment creation and a viable agribusiness environment. An integrator is a private sector partner working with the project to drive the commercialisation agenda under the pork and goat value chain.

Under the pork value chain, the project registered 600 women and young farmers to benefit from training on pig production, smart subsidies and a weaner to finisher scheme which is being supported by private integrators (Shamiso farm, Braford farm and the Pig Industry Board) to upscale domestic production.

“We are working to correct ownership patterns to ensure that women and youths are visible and have decision making roles within the value chain. Through the weaner to finisher programme, opportunities will be created to help women and youth from production right up to marketing, hence nurturing their

skills in agribusiness,” said Shamiso Chauruka the Managing Director of Shamiso Farm – the Mashonaland East Integrator.

To promote participation of women and youth along the goat value chain, the project has ensured that women constitute at least 50% of the target group and have representation in the Goat Producer Business Associations and the commercially oriented Business Management Units which are vehicles spearheading the vertical integration of small and medium producers.

“Our approach is informed by our desire to have women and youth at the forefront of addressing their challenges, we have done this through targeted interventions including ownership of key infrastructure such as the goat improvement centres where women have particularly taken a leadership role in the construction of the facilities,” said Loandy Ncube the Managing Director of Michview Enterprises the Matabeleland goat value chain integrator.

Ncube added that the Goat Innovation Centers (GICs) will ensure that women and youth that are trained on commercialisation, have access to appropriate animal nutrition, animal health services, improved genetics, market aggregation points as well as linkages to private sector players along the value chain.





## IN THE NEXT ISSUE:

- Zimbabwe Food Security Policy Brief Launch.
- Breakfast meeting with Parliament Portfolio Committees on Health and Child Care and Budget, Finance and Economic Development and Young People.
- 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Based Violence commemorations.

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