



Food and Agriculture  
Organization of the  
United Nations

# Zimbabwe Livelihoods and Food Security Programme (LFSP)

Operational and  
strategic partnerships  
to deliver integrated  
programme with  
widespread results  
for Zimbabwe's  
poorest farmers



**Zimbabwe** has some of the highest levels of food insecurity in Sub-Saharan Africa, regardless of the outcome of its agricultural seasons. Approximately 70 percent of the population relies on subsistence rainfed agriculture for their livelihood and food and nutrition security – the majority are smallholder farmers, tilling an average of 1 ha or less per household. The high reliance on subsistence rainfed agriculture renders a large majority of the rural population vulnerable to climate-related shocks and seasonal stressors. According to vulnerability assessments, these households have few sources of income other than agriculture and spend more than 54 percent of their budget on food. Zimbabwe's already precarious food security and nutrition situation is further exacerbated by poorly functioning markets, low soil fertility, and farmers' limited access to credit, knowledge and best practices.

## The Zimbabwe Livelihoods and Food Security Programme: revamping rural livelihoods in the face of climate change

Over the years, FAO and its partners have made tremendous strides in helping the country's most vulnerable people to produce more food, access new markets and diversify into new agricultural enterprises as a way to address the many challenges they face. Since 2014, the Livelihoods and Food Security Programme (LFSP) – a multi-dimensional and multi-partner programme funded by the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID) – has been a cornerstone of these efforts, aiming to boost the agricultural productivity and incomes of over 200 000 farming households (over 1 million people) in 12 rural districts across four provinces in Zimbabwe.

Under the GBP 68.5 million programme, two distinct yet highly synergistic components – Agricultural Productivity and Nutrition, and Market Development – are producing comprehensive results through a combination of extension and nutrition, rural finance, policy support, biofortification, market development, and monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning, with gender mainstreamed across all components.

To date, the programme has produced positive changes in the lives of its beneficiaries. By 2018, through the integration of the LFSP components, the programme had recorded an estimated 40 percent increase in households' average annual income from agriculture. Between 2016 and 2018, the programme increased beneficiaries' household dietary diversity by 47 percent (and children's dietary diversity by 43 percent). Following the LFSP's pioneering and introduction of biofortified

Vitamin A maize, together with biofortified varieties of millet and beans, more than 40 percent of targeted farmers are successfully producing and consuming these nutrient-rich foods.

## Improved access to extension and advisory services

Strengthening the delivery of extension and advisory services – and improving access to such services – is a central element of the LFSP. Its capacity building activities across a range of topics have reached more than 155 000 farmers (60 percent women). This pluralistic extension and advisory services network, for example, has enhanced beneficiaries' skills in good and climate resilient practices. About 90 percent of trained farmers are now practising up to five technologies that will help to improve their productivity and safeguard their livelihoods against climate-related threats. Through trainings, demonstrations, ICT and farmer-to-farmer learning, smallholders have also learned how to better manage their farms, harvest water, choose the right crops to grow and sell, and run their farming operations like a business. Boosting their access to extension and advisory services beyond just agronomic and animal husbandry to also include nutrition behaviour change communication, business and financial literacy has been vital in helping smallholders

to unlock their full agricultural potential in ways that increase yields and income.

### **Better access to markets and financial services**

Through a combination of skill enhancement and market-based interventions, the programme is improving farmers' ability to participate in local and external markets and to enhance their savings. It has linked farmers to more than 118 market players and eight financial institutions, creating a clear pathway for the continuous nurturing of commercial relationships. Targeted technical assistance to financial institutions enabled

them to increase their outreach with more than 318 Agent banking outlets and 12 low-cost branches established thus far. In total, financial institutions disbursed loans totalling USD 25.8 million, directly reaching 36 115 smallholder farmers. The more than 4 000 Internal Saving and Lending Associations (ISAL) groups and 50 SACCOs (Saving and Credit Cooperatives) mentored by the programme were instrumental in generating savings of USD 6.2 million in 2017 and USD 4.6 million in 2018 by the communities and for investments in income generating activities. In addition,

the programme and market players co-created ten models across four areas – input market development, contract farming, output market development and mechanisation – seeking to nurture inclusive agri-business models that offer potential of financial and social returns to market actors and smallholder households.

### **Informing policy with improved evidence and research**

A robust monitoring and learning system for the programme has been geared towards generating evidence for adaptive management of the

## **From the field: Learning the business of farming**

Henry Garapo from Mutasa District grew maize, sugar beans and leaf vegetables on 0.25 hectares of land. He barely managed to feed his family and the little surplus he could produce from the land was insufficient to meet other family needs.

"I couldn't even manage to pay the primary school fees for my children," he said. The turning point was in 2015 when he received training on climate smart agriculture, including on farming as a business, through the LFSP. Part of the training specifically targeted horticulture value chains, motivating Henry to grow onions as a livelihood.

Henry gradually increased his production at each cycle and learned to select varieties with a prolonged shelf life. "I realized that the market for onion is plentiful, ranging from road sides, supermarkets and other open markets like Sakubva in the city (Mutare)."

After linking up with Virl Microfinance Institution through the LFSP, Henry secured a loan of USD 475 to purchase more inputs, which resulted in a yield of three tons and a net income of USD 2 654 from that harvest. Once the loan was repaid, he could afford to buy a cart and two cows. He now rents out land in order to expand his business.

Given the scale of production, he is also planning to construct an additional shed for drying and grading onions. "Truly, I have never dreamt of living like a king by growing an ordinary crop such as onions," he said.



*A microfinance agent provides mobile banking services to a rural farmer client*

programme as well as informing policy dialogue with government and other stakeholders.

Progress was made with analytical work on agricultural diversification and smallholder commercialisation issues and capacity development for government and stakeholders for evidence-based policy making. The LFSP generated a wealth of practice-based evidence that was analysed and synthesised together with relevant secondary evidence, and research findings which significantly contributed towards improving programming and national policy formulation and implementation.

## Operational partnerships: A catalyst for transformational change

At the heart of the programme's success thus far lies a wide range of noteworthy partnerships, which have added value to the interventions and are helping to ensure their sustainability.

The LFSP is one of numerous projects worldwide being implemented in operational partnership under FAO's Operational Partners Implementation Modality (OPIM). Launched in 2015,

OPIM has been increasingly used by FAO to implement its projects and programmes in conjunction with eligible partners. Joining forces with other organizations, working in partnership at all levels to meet these aims and objectives, leads to improved outcomes and enhanced ownership of projects.

When delivering projects jointly with its operational partners, FAO transfers a portion of its project funds to the partners for them to implement the agreed project components, using their own capacity and rules. Each operational partner takes responsibility for its performance and contribution. In addition to



*Practicing what he preaches — Syndon Samakute, LFSP community nutrition & gender champion, feeds nutritious porridge to his son*

## Changing gender roles, fighting malnutrition

Despite being an area rich in agriculture, Manicaland's children five years and younger face high levels of stunting. Stunting — or slower than normal growth in children — is a common indicator of chronic malnutrition in Zimbabwe.

"Our children had food, but they did not have a balanced diet. We eat but we lack many nutrients needed for the body to grow well," explained Syndon Samakute, who became a nutrition champion under the LFSP. Samakute, from Honde Valley, has learned how to cook nutritious porridge for his family — adding a raw egg, butternut squash, peanut butter, sugar and iodized salt.

When asked what other men think of his active role in domestic chores normally relegated to women, Samakute shrugs off the question. "I have no problem with cooking," he says. He acknowledges he is a little different

than most men in the area. "Most men," he says, "have strong patriarchal attitudes. They consider themselves the head of the household, and they do not cook. Most men do not even know the foods required in their households and therefore do not provide enough resources to meet the family nutritional needs. I see men fighting new ideas, but their attitudes only lead us to underdevelopment. Men need to work with their wives."

Samakute believes that the fight against stunting is worth it: collaborating with his wife in diversifying their crops and their diet has improved the health of their two sons. In his home, Samakute says, "We have lost these old views, and we're happy, our children are healthy." Samakute notes that when men and women participate in nutrition activities as couples, the difference is significant. He readily thanked his wife, Loice Chideya, for encouraging him to participate in nutrition sessions.



LFSP promotes positive nutrition behaviours through cooking demos using locally available foods

its implementation role, FAO thoroughly monitors each project and provides technical support to the operational partner. This approach embodies a growing recognition that partners often offer complementary mandates, skills, resources and perspectives that can lead to improved outcomes. Through OPIM, FAO has been able to make the best use of expertise available on the ground, build deeper partnerships, strengthen national and local ownership of interventions and increase the sustainability of results.

### **Making the most of partners' – and FAO's – expertise**

In the context of Zimbabwe, this level of engagement with partners has had a profound impact on FAO's ability to achieve results through the LFSP. Through OPIM, FAO can capitalize on the comparative advantage of its partners,

drawing on invaluable local knowledge and resources to broaden the scope and reach of its interventions. LFSP's engagement of a variety of partners with diverse experiences has, for instance, opened up multiple avenues to reach beneficiaries with new knowledge, skills and technologies. Multi-faceted approaches have included field days, exposure visits, farmer-to-farmer extension, public and private extension and ICT extension, depending on each partner's relative strengths and areas of expertise.

Other strategic partnerships with highly specialized institutions have contributed to the success of some of the programme's most notable results. For instance, the engagement of HarvestPlus – an organization with extensive experience in biofortification – was essential in facilitating the successful

“The LFSP has become a powerful force for challenging gender-based inequalities, advancing gender equality and women empowerment, and promoting positive gender relations both at the household and community levels. Technical support from FAO and OXFAM gender specialists enabled greater generation and sharing of knowledge, and exchange of experience, expertise and practical tools for mainstreaming gender in our agriculture programmes. This strategic partnership has enhanced the development of the GALS methodology and participatory approaches for assessing and addressing gender-based barriers along value chains.”

– Kudzai Marovanidze,  
Regional Director, Practical  
Action Southern Africa

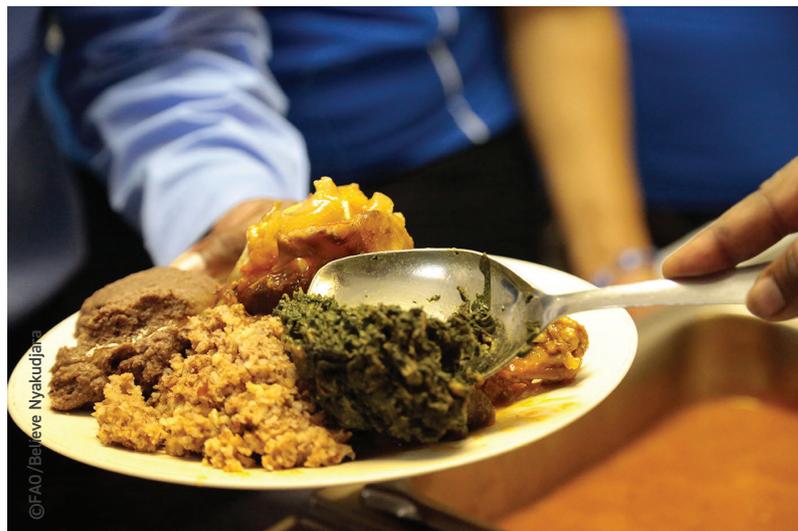
introduction and promotion of Vitamin A-enriched orange maize and high iron and zinc sugar bean varieties. The programme's highly successful policy influence work, meanwhile, has benefited from the skills and resources of the Indaba Agricultural Policy Research Institute (IAPRI). IAPRI's work has generated evidence-based knowledge products to improve awareness, appreciation and understanding of constraints and opportunities in the policy environment of two broad thematic areas: agricultural diversification, and rural finance

“LFSP successfully collaborated and nurtured a very effective partnership with government and a multitude of implementing, strategic, cooperating partners. FAO contracted partners in consortia to derive maximum benefits through the technical mix of skills, varied levels of field presence and relationships with local authorities and technical expertise in specialised areas like biofortification and policy research. The approach enabled the simultaneous delivery of different components in an integrated way ensuring attainment of impacts. The LFSP’s robust coordination structures allowed cross-learning and joint delivery.”

– Ali Said, LFSP Chief  
Technical Advisor, FAO

and commercialization. What is more, it has utilized its existing presence and influence within Zimbabwe to directly support actual policy and strategy formulation by relevant government ministries, having championed the formulation of the draft National Agriculture Policy Framework, Coffee and Horticulture Strategies.

Similarly, LFSP’s operational partners have benefited from FAO’s own expertise. Technical backstopping from across the Organization – a key element of OPIM – has significantly boosted partners’ capacity in



*A balanced meal of locally available foods*

delivering certain aspects of their activities, in turn contributing to more transformational results. This is perhaps most evident in the programme’s considerable gender outcomes. Following partners’ extensive training on the Gender Action Learning Systems (GALS) methodology, and its application across their activities, significant changes were documented in community institutional structures that are empowering women (i.e. producer groups, internal savings and lending schemes, commodity associations), as well as considerable behaviour changes at household level, with more men doing household chores, joint decision-making, and shifts in ownership and control of assets. GALS application reached over 50 000 households and is credited with the reported shifts of 37 percent of households in both improved ownership and control of assets by women as

well as increased joint ownership of assets. Perhaps even stronger was the support for the roll-out of nutrition Behaviour Change Communication where the adoption of the CARE GROUP model has been mainstreamed within LFSP implementing partners and adopted as a preferred approach by the government.

### **Coordination and communication foster synergy**

The existence of governance structures (an apex National Programme Coordination Committee and Programme Management Committee) has ensured compliance with contractual obligations in terms of programme delivery, tracking results, risk management and achieving value for money through a structured monitoring and accountability process using approaches such as conducting joint monitoring and field visits,

and – to the extent possible – joint localities of operation at district level. In addition, an elaborate management and coordination structure among the programme’s managing organizations has enabled effective coordination and communication with stakeholders – including the donor, implementing and strategic partners and government – while ensuring an integrated programme delivery approach, alignment with government priorities and realization of synergies across the components.

Communication with lead implementing partners and sub-grantees is ensured by the bi-monthly implementing partner coordination forum facilitated by FAO. In addition to this, FAO holds bilateral meetings with lead implementing partners and members of the Consortia after every quarterly monitoring mission. At the sub-national level, the lead implementing partners participate in the provincial- and district-level food and nutrition security coordination platforms to ensure synergy and coordination with other livelihoods and food and nutrition initiatives by government, NGOs and the private sector.

### **Ensuring adaptability with flexible programming**

The trickle-down effect of this coordination and communication has translated

into a strong culture of feedback between FAO and its operational partners, having a profound impact on the adaptability of the LFSP. Regular joint monitoring missions, for example, have contributed to better understanding and coordination between FAO and its partners through the provision of direct feedback. This feedback loop has enabled partners to implement real-time course correction when needed, as well as report back on their own observations on the ground for FAO’s consideration in making strategic improvements to the programme design.

A notable example is the inclusion of a crisis modifier as a result of the 2016 El Niño-induced drought, the poor outlook of the 2018/19 agricultural season, and the macroeconomic crises negatively impacting beneficiaries. In order

“World Vision appreciates the ongoing partnership with FAO through the LFSP and the technical and advisory support received. Feedback provided from field visits and other interactions has helped enhance programme outputs and provide an objective perspective for our programme through improved learning and activity adjustments.”

– Emmanuel Isch,  
National Director,  
World Vision Zimbabwe

to prevent the programme’s investment in market-based approaches from being eroded, FAO and partners negotiated with DFID and implementing partners to realign the project activities, budget and logframe to reflect the reality on the ground. Some activities were ramped up (i.e. Climate-Smart Agriculture, nutrition gardens



*A mother prepares a nutritious breakfast for her children using knowledge gained from LFSP training*

and processing activities) by allocating smart subsidies and matching grants from the available programme budget.

The feedback loop was also vital, for example, in prompting valuable changes to the Theory of Change to incorporate elements of youth empowerment across programme activities. The interactive nature of these partnerships is also evident through the programme's learning events, which have provided a platform for implementing partners to reflect on their respective approaches and experiences, granting opportunities for cross-learning. As a result, partners have been able to adapt their approaches to engaging with beneficiaries based on good practices encountered by other partners.

### **A view towards longer-term results**

Early signs of the sustainability of programme activities is a strong testament to the value of this way of working.

Key findings from a number of evaluative studies conducted over the course of the programme, including a midline evaluation and cohort studies, confirm that agricultural production and crop diversity have increased substantially since the baseline

(particularly biofortified and drought-tolerant crops). In addition, farmers' main source of market information is direct contact with LFSP stakeholders and extension workers, which has increased participation in markets among the poorest households. There is evidence that households have improved their food security, decreasing household hunger and increased consumption of a greater variety of foods. A cohort study conducted in May 2018, showing the combined effect of the programme when a household participated in all three of its key components (agricultural productivity and nutrition trainings, market development and rural finance) demonstrated the overall positive impact of the LFSP. Of the five outcomes measured, the greatest positive change was registered in households' ability to produce their own food, with 90 percent of the households reporting that food production had improved over the programme period, 86 percent of households reporting a positive change in intra-household relationships (mainly attributed to gender trainings), and 84 percent having an increase in household income. Thanks to positive examples such as the LFSP, OPIM is now a well-established and increasingly important way of working for FAO.

“DFID Zimbabwe is really pleased with what LFSP has achieved since the launch of the programme in December 2013. It hasn't always been easy, with challenges in the economic, political and climatic environment. But to their immense credit and despite these hurdles, FAO and partners demonstrated a high level of adaptability and good risk management. Thanks to a coordinated approach from partners, this has resulted in successful delivery of multiple components of the programme.

We are happy to be associated with the piloting of the new partnership operation arrangements that FAO adopted for the programme, which enabled the management of some of the technical partners, with the market developers, Palladium International to be streamlined and simplified. FAO Zimbabwe employed new models which featured a more robust monitoring of programme delivery, ultimately leading to it being easier for partners to remain alive to the ever-changing context in Zimbabwe and adjust their course accordingly. Any significant changes and practice-based evidence from the programme beneficiaries is now recorded. Thanks to these new innovations, this DFID-funded programme has set the pace for learning and influencing policy and programming in Zimbabwe.”

— Annabel Gerry, Head of Office, DFID Zimbabwe and South-Africa

Cover photograph: Syndon Samakute, LFSP community nutrition and gender champion, and his family ©FAO/Brett Eloff

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