



PROJECT LESSONS-LEARNED REPORT

MAY 2015- MARCH 2023

Submitted: May 2023

Project Title:	Zimbabwe Resilience Building Fund (ZRBF)
Country:	Zimbabwe
Related UNDP CPD Outcome	<p>Planet: Strengthening environmental protection, climate resilience, and natural resource management for a sustainable balance between people, planet, and prosperity</p> <p>Prosperity: Fostering equitable, sustainable, and transformative economic growth that contributes to lifting people out of multidimensional poverty.</p>
Project Description and Key Lessons Learned: 2015-2023	
Brief description of the context	<p>Over the last decade, Zimbabwe experienced several unprecedented economic, environmental, and social shocks and stresses which have long-lasting negative impacts, particularly on rural communities. These continue to be exacerbated by the effects of climate change over the same period. The challenge of Zimbabwe's progress toward reaching agenda 2030 and its National Goals was already significant, even before the COVID-19 pandemic hit. The concept of resilience emerged as a plausible framework among the Government, and humanitarian and development actors as a longer-term cost-effective strategy for substantially improving national and local capacity to withstand shocks and stresses, ultimately leading to a reduced need for humanitarian response and an increase in people's well-being.</p> <p>Although extreme poverty declined since its peak in 2020, it remains high in the context of cyclical agricultural production and elevated food prices. Persistent inflation, high dependence on low-productivity agriculture, slow structural transformation, and intermittent shocks like droughts, cyclones, and the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to the high rate of poverty and vulnerability in Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe ranks 141 out of 184 countries on the 2021 Human Development Index and the national poverty rate stands at 38.3 percent. With a rural poverty rate of 52 percent, the risks of vulnerable households facing negative impacts, not only characterized by food, nutrition, and income deficits but by an overall loss of previous development gains are high. Rural poverty trends are particularly worrying as more than half (67.7%) of the population resides in rural areas and is largely dependent on farming. Poverty in Zimbabwe is a complex interplay of structural and transient. The structural elements are linked to economic, social, political, and cultural dynamics that contribute to unequal access to economic and natural resources, employment, and educational opportunities. The transient components are fuelled by, among others, climate variability and change causing increased frequencies of droughts, floods, and cyclones, the negative impact of a declining economy, limited employment and job opportunities, under-employment, impacts of HIV and AIDS,</p>

	<p>the unreliability of agriculture, especially in communal areas and resettlement areas, as well as the unsatisfactory quality of education, particularly in rural areas.</p> <p>The country's food security situation remains fragile over the past decades. Trend analysis of the Zimbabwe Vulnerability Assessment Committee (ZimVAC) data and results on food insecurity situation over the past 10 years shows a fluctuation between 12 percent and 60 percent of the population being food insecure with a variation of up to 200 percent between consecutive years. The spatial variation, however, as well as the links between income sources, food, and nutrition security indicate that the availability of food is not only a question of production or the general economic outlook but is closely linked to pricing, marketing, affordability, preparation, and access. Over one million rural Zimbabweans have been food insecure during the peak hunger period from January to March in the last 5 years as per trend analysis of ZimVac.</p> <p>Given the above context, there is a need to rethink development assistance for the segment of the population that is at heightened risk of vulnerabilities caused by the impacts of climate change and other natural disasters. Such a population experiences weak resilience capacities due to several factors interlinked with the general shift in socio-economic structures. Their situation is often characterized by food and nutrition insecurity, income deprivation, increased environmental degradation, and further compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic. Addressing these challenges will require a whole government and whole community approach in partnership with multi-sector stakeholders.</p>
<p>Brief description of the project</p>	<p>The Zimbabwe Resilience Building Fund (ZRBF) programme began in May 2015 to increase the capacities of communities to protect development gains in the face of multiple shocks and stressors. The programme seeks to build the resilience of at-risk labor-endowed households and communities so that they can absorb and adapt to the impacts of shocks and stressors and, in doing so, reduce the need for recurring, costly humanitarian interventions in the long term. The expected result of the ZRBF's interventions is enhanced food security and livelihood diversification strategies in targeted communities that increase resilience to recurrent stresses/shocks. To achieve this, the Programme is comprised of the following three interlinked components, which each deliver an intermediate result:</p> <p><i>Expected Result 1.</i> Increase effective evidence-based institutional, legislative, and policy frameworks in place at national and sub-national levels for resilience.</p> <p><i>Expected Result 2.</i> Increase the absorptive, adaptive, and transformative capacities to face shocks and the effects of climate change for people in vulnerable communities frequently exposed to multiple hazards; and</p> <p><i>Expected Result 3.</i> A crisis modifier that can provide early warning and early action to reduce the impact of climate-induced shocks for the fund in ZRBF Programme areas. It is a pre-humanitarian tool that can be used to quickly mobilize resources before a major shock to protect development gains</p>
<p>Key project successes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ZRBF's demonstrated progress in increasing resilience capacities over the last six years. The impact evaluation reviewed that 945,458 people from a target of 830 000 people had their resilience improved as a result of ZRBF interventions. The program reached out to 1,1 million people; thus, 84.83% of the ZRBF beneficiary caseload had improved resilience. ▪ The prevalence of food insecurity decreased from 44% to 23% among ZRBF beneficiaries.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Households adopting climate-smart agricultural production technologies- increased from 70% to 96% as a result of the program.▪ The program managed to decrease the Livelihoods and asset-based coping strategy index from a score of 14 at baseline to 2 at the Endline.▪ The program increased the average monthly household income from USD54 at baseline to USD74 in 2019; USD81 in 2020 and USD118 in 2021. Therefore, based on this inflation adjustment, the ZRBF programme managed to increase income from a baseline figure of \$54 to \$88.38 at Endline (thus a 39% increase in income) against an ambitious target of \$111.54, (52% increase).▪ The percentage of households with acceptable food-based coping strategy index score, increased from a baseline of 38% to 69% at the Endline.▪ Over 100 000 households were supported with access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation services.▪ Over 2000 functional pieces of productive Infrastructures for resilience-building were established/ repaired.▪ Implementation of the Crisis Modifier Mechanism protected development gains for 131 578 direct beneficiary households through rapid response and recovery interventions.▪ The program generated more than 100 analytical papers and technical notes from inception that were used to inform policy and programming decisions.▪ The program set up knowledge-sharing platforms such as the resilience knowledge centre, Agriculture Information Management System (AIMS), Performance Information Management System (PMIS) –ZRBF performance information repository.▪ Successful Policy engagements include commercialisation of Traditional Grains Strategy; Animal health act and livestock Statutory instruments review; by-laws; Sunflower and Legume Value Chain Strategy; Principles of the Disaster Risk Management and Civil Protection Bill;
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<p>Project shortcomings and solutions</p>	<p>Key risks to the success of the program</p> <p>Several risks and assumptions were stated in the programme document. These were economic, political, and organizational risks related to the difficulty in rethinking development assistance and implementing the resilience agenda in the context of protracted humanitarian assistance over the past decades. The PMU set up a multidisciplinary Risk Monitoring committee that met quarterly to monitor and assess the identified and emerging risks and update the risk matrix. The discussions and proposed mitigation measures were taken to the project board (Steering Committee) for further discussion, approval, and action. Other challenges were encountered, which required specific attention and recalibrating of actions. The overall programme risk was medium, and the key risks include:</p> <p>Risk 1: Limited capacity of implementing partners, given the large step change to resilience building.</p> <p>Counter measures: The programme team considered this risk right at the start of the programme and set up clear selection criteria and robust sensitization of potential partners before the procurement process. Analytical platforms improved the understanding of chronic vulnerabilities, the nature of the shocks and stresses, and the capacities to withstand them. In addition, funds were made available for cross-learning between implementing partners.</p> <p>Risk 2: Lack of coordination with other Government/donor programs undermines the resilience approach.</p> <p>Counter measures: EU member states signatory to the EU/DFID resilience strategy; a Wider Influencing strategy put in place to ensure more coherence, including the Government of Zimbabwe's approaches. Alignment of the programme to the government blueprint and development partners' priorities ensured coherence and minimized conflicting approaches.</p> <p>Risk 3: Reduced donor funding, affecting delivery targets and the number of districts for implementation.</p> <p>Counter measures: A broad-based donor influencing strategy was put in place, to ensure multiple donor funding. Partners were engaged to co-fund and bring additional resources where necessary.</p> <p>Risk 4: Fraud</p> <p>Counter measure: Funds were channeled through UNDP with approved financial management and audit systems, monitoring, and due diligence. Frequent trainings were held to ensure that partners understand the Zero tolerance of UNDP's programmes.</p> <p>Risk 5: Climate shock</p> <p>Counter measure: The Programme was designed to influence the long-term approach to managing increasing climate risk in Zimbabwe and building resilience in communities.</p>
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<p>Lessons learned: High level</p>	<p>Learning from What worked well.</p> <p>This section provides a summary of high-level lessons learned from inception to completion of the programme. Further information from more lessons learned can be gleaned from the Outcome Monitoring Survey; Endline; and Value for Money reports.</p> <p>Resilience Pathway Model Works- ZRBF's demonstrated progress in increasing resilience capacities over the last six years and provides evidence and a clear rationale for continuing resilience-building efforts as a key strategy for improving household well-being outcomes in the face of recurrent climatic and socio-economic shocks.</p> <p>Partnerships critical for resilience building- Strong partnerships with leadership from Government, UN, development partners, consortia, and private across sectors works for resilience building (SDG17). The use of already existing structures through stakeholder coordination and partnerships was the key enabler to ZRBF's success. Strong synergies and collaboration with the existing programs were instrumental to the success of the program. This is also critical for consolidating the impact and sustainability of interventions. In addition, co-financing and pulling financial resources from multiple partners is a best practice that promotes sustainability. ZRBF was funded by multiple funding partners and with some consortia partners co-funding some activities.</p> <p>Resilience is a game of diversity: Individuals, households, and communities need multiple capacities to cope with and adapt to shocks and stressors, including climate change. Multiple ways of combining, layering, and sequencing project activities helped to build the resilience capacities of target communities. Layering, sequencing, and integration of activities based on context works for resilience building. Multiple interventions applied to the same community and households based on needs and context works. Households' resilience is better built through diversification— layering, sequencing, and integration of livelihoods/economic activities delivered through multiple partnerships and effective collaborative management.</p> <p>Support and flexibility by Donors - Support & flexibility of ZRBF's development partners (donors) for the resilience agenda enabled the program to adapt and achieve the results through the provision of relevant, high-impact interventions. The program practiced adaptive management and programming to deal with the changing context. Integration of the crisis modifier provided flexibility in responding to emergencies and protecting investment gains.</p> <p>Certain Crisis Modifier activities are winners because they act both as resilience cushions and transforming drivers of vulnerability and building adaptive capacity e.g., the establishment of community productive assets i.e., dams, gardens, and rehabilitation of irrigation schemes, solarisation of high-yielding boreholes, 6 months funding acaricides alongside the promotion of Sustainable dipping model, bush meal threshers and low-cost survival feed for livestock. The program maintained the resilience lens within the crisis modifier framework i.e., cash support for productive assets.</p> <p>The bottom-up approach works in policy evolution and implementation. Policy work should focus on the operationalization of policies. Providing supportive interventions is critical in operationalizing policies and strategies.</p> <p>Livestock matter for resilience building: Livestock rearing as foundational livelihood activities. Livestock is a form of insurance for smallholder farmers in the event of shocks and stress as these can be disposed to get income and sustain the household. On the other hand, income from ISALs can be invested first in chickens then in goats then cattle over time.</p>
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Bushmeal and fodder production is a practical way of preventing cattle poverty deaths for smallholder farmers when pastures deteriorate and during the worst droughts. Bushmeal and fodder production has multiple benefits, and the roll-out strategy took a holistic approach to embrace a diversity of permutations (ecological assessments, business management training, marketing, and technical pieces of training), and partnership with ordinary farmers enhance the co-creation of knowledge.

Value chain development initiatives and market linkages partnering with private companies are critical for resilience building and sustainability.

It is important to focus on **high-value crops in irrigation schemes** to ensure viability and sustainability as these are high capital investments that also require maintenance. The high cost of setting up and maintaining irrigation schemes requires the commercialization of these smallholder schemes and the growing of high-value crops to ensure viability and sustainability.

A cost recovery mechanism is essential to stimulate sustainability and ownership when piloting or scaling up technologies and no interventions should be seen as free handouts of any type to community members.

Vocational skills training, entrepreneurship, and off-farm activities are key to gender and youth inclusion in resilience building as they have greater economic benefits. Young people are attracted to interventions that have direct, quick, and sustainable economic benefits. These also act as fallback livelihood activities when on-farm rain-fed activities are off-season or during a bad season.

Village Savings and lending (VSALs) are critical for women's empowerment as the roll-out strategy involves capacity building, confidence building, and social and economic empowerment. VSALs should be a critical layer for every beneficiary. They are also a springboard for other interventions as they provide initial funding to other income-generating activities.

Learning from what did not work well.

This section notes some of the key interventions that were envisaged with the potential of adding value to the communities' resilience-building efforts, however, these could not work as planned due to a number of factors.

Both crop and livestock insurance for smallholder farmers- are challenged by hyper-inflationary conditions and policy inconsistencies which need to be addressed by the government.

Formal Financial inclusion through banks and micro-finance institutions failed to work as the interest rates were very high- from 45% to the current 200% and the credit facilities were not compatible with the smallholder farming operations. This will continue to be a hindrance to resilience building unless addressed by the government.

Competing operational modalities (uncoordinated Humanitarian versus Resilience programs)- advocacy at all levels is necessary. It is expected that the resilience platform borne out of the programme will help in addressing these competing operational modalities.

Artificial insemination – in communal setup smallholder poor resources farmers was a challenge and this needs to be complimented by other livestock feeding supporting programs and proper management and monitoring of inseminated livestock.

Community-Based Water infrastructure maintenance remains a challenge. This requires further research to understand the community dynamics around governance and maintenance of community water infrastructures over time.

Follow-up Actions	<p>Based on the Impact Evaluation Endline study¹ the following are the key follow-up actions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Invest in upstream and downstream policy work - supporting the development and implementation of policies (as has proved to work in the first phase). 2. Strengthen local-level policy advocacy¹ by identifying key policy issues in districts that can be addressed through by-laws, local resource allocation, and strengthening the link between policy messaging, advocacy approaches, and evidence generation. 3. Deliver more of the same resilience-building interventions, but better evolved in developing capacities for value-added practices and market linkages by farmers (building on and scaling up the successful value-added services). 4. Draw on lessons from ZRBF and design a strategy that provides a coherent package of water services across the programme area informed by context-specific needs – including in-field water harvesting and drip irrigation technologies. 5. Strengthen key Government departments in climate, water, and technology issues for sustainability purposes. 6. Continue with the layered approach and consolidate tried and tested (best practices) high-impact interventions already identified in this phase. 7. Scale up best practices already identified and strengthened the sustainability of these gains. For infrastructure specifically, undertake an inventory of the performance of various pieces of infrastructure developed under the programme determining functionality and measures for sustainability. 8. The crisis modifier mechanism should remain operational to help households recover from shocks but should be gradually withdrawn (with trigger severity increased over time as the capacities of households improve). 9. Adopt a long-term approach to resilience building for targeted communities that ensures interaction with beneficiaries for at least ten years, instead of the current five-year cycle. 10. Strengthening evidence-based graduation strategy using the evidence already created by the programme through OMS, impact studies, and other internal monitoring data.
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Project Information	
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Project resources:	www.zrbf.co.zw ; http://resilienceknowledgecentre.co.zw
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¹ ZRBF Endline Study Report, 2022