

A New Dawn with Solar Power

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Admire Benjamin – Mahwawu Community Garden Chairman

Nurturing Community Gardens and Harmony in Hurungwe Writes UNDP Zimbabwe

In the heart of Hurungwe rural district and the sun-drenched landscapes of Mashonaland West Province, Zimbabwe, a transformative initiative is quietly blooming. Through the innovative use of solar-powered piped water schemes, local communities are creating thriving gardens that mitigate the persistent human-wildlife conflicts that have long troubled this region. Here, the community is coming together to tackle a problem that has long plagued their existence: the conflict between humans and wildlife.

For years, the residents of Hurungwe have faced the challenges posed by elephants, baboons, and other wildlife that raid their crops, leading to significant losses and heightened tensions. Traditional methods of nurturing and protecting crops, such as

building fences and staying up all night to ward off animals, have proven to be labour-intensive and often ineffective. However, a new, sustainable solution is bringing hope and transforming lives—a solarized water piped scheme and fenced community gardens to ensure crop security and reliable access to water.

A Ray of Hope

With the introduction of the Zambezi Valley Biodiversity Project, under the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) with financial support from the Global Environment Facility (GEF), over three thousand (3,000) households in Wards 7, 8, and 9 of Hurungwe districts through the establishment of six (6) solar water piped schemes and community gardens have improved their livelihoods and increased access to clean water. These solar-powered pumps provide a reliable water supply that has not only revitalized agriculture but also reduced the need for villagers to venture into the wild to fetch water, thereby decreasing encounters with potentially dangerous animals.

Constance Masona (68), a local farmer and member of the Ward 8 Mahwawu community garden, widow, and grandmother to five (5) grandchildren, shares her story: “Before the solar pumps and fenced garden, we struggled every day. Water was scarce, and the crops we grew were often destroyed by wildlife as it was a consistent battle. We would lose so much to the animals, and it was disheartening. Now, with the coming of this garden, our crops are flourishing, and we have enough water to sustain them. I am now able to take care of my orphaned grandchildren through farming, taking them through education, feeding, and clothing. It is a blessing.”

Strengthening Community and Conservation

The establishment of solar-powered water schemes has had a ripple effect, enhancing community cohesion and promoting environmental conservation. These gardens are a communal effort, with families working side by side to cultivate the land. This collaborative spirit has strengthened social ties and created a supportive network that benefits everyone.

Moreover, the initiative fosters a more balanced coexistence with nature by reducing human encroachment into wildlife territories. The presence of reliable, solar-powered water sources means that wildlife is less likely to venture into human settlements in search of water, significantly lowering the risk of conflict.

Stories of Resilience and Growth

In Chitindiva village in Ward 7, 45-year-old Tinashe Nyamuzwe reflects on the profound changes he has witnessed. “We used to lose so much to the elephants. They

would come at night and trample everything. But with the fenced garden, we have seen a dramatic decrease in such incidents. Our harvests are secure, and we can focus on building a better future for our children.”

The new development equally inspires the younger generation. Twenty-year-old Chipso Mberi, who helps her family in the garden, sees a bright future ahead. “I’m learning about sustainable farming and renewable energy. It gives me hope that we can solve our problems without harming the environment. I want to continue this work and help our community thrive,” she says, her eyes shining with ambition.

A glance into the Future

The success of the solar-powered water scheme in Hurungwe has attracted attention from neighbouring villages, districts, and beyond. Environmental organizations and government agencies are taking note and exploring ways to replicate this model in other areas facing similar challenges.

As the sun sets over Hurungwe, the solar panels continue their quiet work, ensuring that the pumps deliver life-sustaining water to the community gardens. This harmonious blend of technology and nature symbolizes a sustainable path forward, where human ingenuity and respect for the environment go hand in hand.

In Hurungwe, the seeds of innovation have been planted, nourished by the sun and the community’s collaborative spirit. As these gardens grow, so too does the promise of a future where humans and wildlife coexist in harmony, each thriving in their shared environment.

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