

ZIMPAPERS NOW OFFERS COURIER SERVICES



[Home](#) / [Local News](#) / Integrating gender: Irrigation, climate action, women's empowerment



Tsistsi Hungwe

[LOCAL NEWS](#)

Integrating gender: Irrigation, climate action, women's empowerment

[March 22, 2024](#) /

Gibson Mhaka

WITH climate change disrupting rainfall patterns in many rural areas, small-scale irrigation systems are becoming crucial tools for reducing farm production risks and improving the well-being of peasant farmers like Tsistsi Hungwe (54) in the dry Pikinini Village under Chief Mawarire in Ward 4 of Mwenezi East, Masvingo Province.

Mwenezi, just like other districts in Masvingo, which falls under natural regions four and five has suffered from increasing temperatures, uneven distribution and variability of rainfall and drought.

This has forced men to migrate to cities in search of work, leaving women — traditionally responsible for childcare and household chores — on the frontlines of both climate change and the resulting conflict.

Despite leading frontline climate action and activism, women like Hungwe are often excluded from crucial resources like irrigated agriculture.

An analysis of irrigation projects reveals that in many cases women's participation in irrigated agriculture has been limited due to a lack of access to land and water.

Despite working together and sharing the same aspirations for improved agricultural livelihoods and family well-being, women in farming households often face unequal access to the benefits of irrigation compared to men.

Even though irrigation serves as an essential lifeline for farmers and food production globally, women like Hungwe still face unequal access to this vital resource.

To address these gender disparities and ensure irrigation and water management programmes benefit everyone equally, the Government through the Ministry of Lands, Agriculture, Fisheries, Water and Rural Development partnered with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) on a “Building Climate Resilience of Vulnerable Agricultural Livelihoods in Southern Zimbabwe” programme.

This project which is funded by the Green Climate Fund (GCF) targets vulnerable communities, particularly women in southern Zimbabwe, in the provinces of Manicaland, Masvingo and Matabeleland South.

The project, which has been running from 9 June 2020 and will end on 8 June 2027, aims to strengthen the resilience of agricultural livelihoods in the face of increasing climate risks and impacts.

Zimbabwe National Water Authority (Zinwa), Agritex, Meteorological Services Department and the Department of Irrigation are the responsible parties leading its implementation.

One of the project’s investments in climate-proofing agriculture is the 156-hectare Pikinini-Jawanda Irrigation Scheme, in Ward 4 of Mwenezi East.

The project, which is set to improve the livelihoods of women farmers like Hungwe who have struggled to overcome the gender productivity gap, is made up of 300 members, with 123 women and 177 men.

Studies have shown that while women make up almost half of the global agricultural workforce, they consistently have less access to technologies, information, resources and finance for their activities.

According to Pikinini-Jawanda Irrigation Scheme chairman, Chizivano Shava (56), the project brings together farmers from two villages, Pikinini and Jawanda.

“The project combines two villages, Pikinini and Jawanda. Our irrigation scheme covers 156 hectares and has 300 members; 123 women and 177 men. Three of our members are orphans and some lack identification documents. We represent them in the project. We also have five elderly members and 15 widows.



Anesu Freddy

“As beneficiaries, we’re actively clearing the land. We’re about 80 percent done, but we need a donation for fencing. Currently, we’re using the cleared trees as a temporary measure,” said Shava.

He adds: “Our area lagged behind in terms of development despite the fact the Manyuchi Dam, our water source, was built in 1985. Although irrigation was proposed around 1987, it never materialised. We’ve seen Chiefs Maranda, Murove and Neshuro benefit from the dam for years. Thankfully, this partnership between the Ministry of Lands, Agriculture, Fisheries, Water and Rural Development and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) means we’re no longer left behind.”

Hungwe said women farmers who have been struggling with low yields due to poor methods will benefit from the project, boosting their economic empowerment.

“As women farmers this project will empower us economically. For years, we’ve been planting crops that get scorched by the sun before harvest. This project will transform our lives. With irrigation, our crops will survive and thrive. This means we can sell our produce, buy food for our families and send our children to school. Economic empowerment will also help reduce gender-based violence in our communities,” said Hungwe.

Another beneficiary, Fiona Chinyana, said when irrigation technologies consider women’s needs and allow them to use and benefit from them, women can gain greater status within their households and communities.

“When women benefit from access to irrigation technologies, this can lead to improved livelihood, health and nutrition outcomes. This can empower us to participate more in decision-making across other aspects of our lives,” said Chinyana.

Commending the project, Ellina Rikiyosi (53) said promoting women’s empowerment in irrigation agriculture was vital since efforts towards ensuring food security have identified women farmers as key role players in many contexts and set-ups.

“Women play a significant role in agriculture since they manage households and pursue multiple livelihood strategies. Efforts towards ensuring food security have identified women farmers as key role players in many contexts and set-ups,” said Rikiyosi.

Provincial focal person for GCF projects in the Ministry of Lands, Agriculture, Fisheries, Water and Rural Development, Masvingo Province, Engineer Rangarirai Mutusva said the project aims to address food insecurity and support the national vision of achieving zero hunger by 2030.

“Through a collaborative effort between the Zimbabwean government and the United Nations Development Fund, a successful irrigation project funded by the Green Climate Fund (GCF) has been implemented here in Mwenezi district. The Government has provided electricity to the site through REA (Rural Electrification Agency) and will also be responsible for fencing the area.

“Farmers have actively participated in the project by clearing land and performing other manual labour tasks, demonstrating their commitment to its success. The irrigation systems have undergone both dry and wet testing and are fully operational. The only remaining step is the completion of land clearing, which will pave the way for farmers to begin cultivating the land,” said Eng Mutusva.

He said the Government applauds these interventions in arid districts like Mwenezi, where water scarcity is a significant challenge.

“By empowering farmers with access to irrigation, the project will have a substantial impact on surrounding communities, promoting self-sufficiency in food production,” said Eng Mutusva.

UNDP communications associate Anesu Freddy said their organisation was committed to transforming irrigation schemes into profitable ventures that benefit local communities.

“The Pikiini-Jawanda Irrigation Scheme currently under development in Mwenezi district is an initiative which falls under a project called ‘Building Climate Resilience of Vulnerable Agricultural Livelihoods in Southern Zimbabwe,’ being supported by the Green Climate Fund and implemented across three provinces of Masvingo, Manicaland and Matabeleland South.

“The project has three key objectives: firstly, to increase access to water for irrigation; secondly, to improve access to climate information so farmers can make informed decisions about planting times and crop selection; and thirdly, to train farmers in climate-smart agricultural practices,” said Freddy.

He said the data and research conducted point to these specific provinces and districts, including Mwenezi, as the areas which are severely impacted by climate change in Zimbabwe. He further said the project’s overall goal was to empower communities in the targeted regions to become more resilient.

[Share on Facebook](#)

[Tweet](#)

[Follow us](#)

[Save](#)