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Pikinini-Jawanda Irrigation Scheme: A dream realised after 37 years

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Tsitsi Hungwe, a farmer from Pikinini village and beneficiary of the new irrigation scheme, sees more than just good harvests coming to her community. Hungwe, along with 299 others, believes the project will also empower women and reduce gender-based violence.

Mwenezi, a district 467km from the capital, faces scorching temperatures and the harsh effects of climate change, including El Niño's impact on crop yields this year. The Pikinini-Jawanda irrigation scheme, expected to be fully operational next year, promises to quench the drought and improve livelihoods in both Pikinini and Jawanda villages.

"Madiridziro (Irrigation scheme) won't just bring good harvests, it will end gender-based violence," says Hungwe, a member of her village's grievances committee.

"The men here don't have steady jobs, and the little they make from odd jobs often isn't shared with their families. Children go hungry and can't afford school because their fathers waste money on traditional beer and illicit brews,"

"When questioned about this," Hungwe continues, "the men become violent. We believe that once the irrigation scheme is up and running, more women will be empowered to work and support themselves. They won't need to rely on their husbands, which will reduce violence."

A mother of three, Hungwe (53) has watched her two daughters marry young and her son leave the country to find work. The irrigation scheme, she says, has been a dream since the construction of the Manyuchi Dam in 1987.

"We have held onto the hope of having this scheme for so long," Hungwe says.

"My mother even used to save money for the project back then. The funds were deposited in a Masvingo bank, but inflation wiped them out.

“We are all so excited to finally see this dream come true and use the dam water to irrigate our crops. This is a landmark development for our communities, and we're grateful to every partner involved."

Chief Elliot Jawanda, a local leader, is excited about the new irrigation project.

He believes it will solve hunger issues and help the community adapt to climate change.

Previously, limited water and extreme heat forced them to grow only drought-resistant crops.

Now, with irrigation, they will have more freedom to choose what they plant and ensure food security.

The irrigation scheme is funded by the Green Climate Fund, and implemented by UNDP together with the government of Zimbabwe through the Ministry of lands and agriculture.

The project started in the year 2020 and is expected to end in 2027. Civil works on the site started last year.

"The scope of the project is mainly focusing on three areas, firstly to increase access to water for agriculture through climate smart irrigation systems and also to improve water resource management," Anesu Freddy, the communications associate for UNDP said.

Secondly, Freddy said, "It's meant to scale up climate resilient agricultural production in areas hard hit by climate change.

"Lastly, to improve weather, climate and hydrological information so that farmers know what and when to plant,"

The project, costing $48 million, is spread in Masvingo, Manicaland and Matabeleland South provinces.

The total investment put in at Pikinini-Jawanda irrigation scheme is $1.1 million; this includes feasibility and design studies of establishing the scheme, 9km electricity power lines, transformers and connecting to grid.

Other technicalities covered are water abstraction — the pontoon where water is drawn from Manyuchi Dam, water

convencing — the pumps that draw water, over 5km of trenching and piping to the field, irrigation system (centre pivots, sprinkler system) and lastly solarising of community boreholes.

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