

MERCY CORPS; ZIM-AHEAD AND SAFIRE

DRAFT REPORT: END OF PROJECT EVALUATION EC FOOD SECURITY AND LIVELIHOOD INDEPENDENCE PROGRAM

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Acknowledgements

Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	3
1. INTRODUCTION	6
1.1. BACKGROUND	6
1.2. Purpose of the evaluation	6
2. EVALUATION METHODOLOGY AND APPROACHES	7
3. KEY FINDINGS	7
3.1. IRRIGATION REHABILITATION	8
3.1.1. Results achieved.....	8
3.1.2. Effectiveness of methodologies and approach	8
3.1.3. Impact of irrigation rehabilitation.....	11
3.1.4. Sustainability of benefits	12
3.1.5. Emerging Issues/lessons from the irrigation intervention	12
3.2. FOOD, AGRICULTURE and NUTRITION (FAN).....	13
3.2.1. Results achieved.....	13
This component exceeded most its targets and the table below shows the results achieved in the three years of the project in the districts of Buhera, Chipnge and Chiredzi.....	13
3.2.2. Effectiveness of FAN methodologies and approaches	15
3.2.3. Impact of FAN intervention	16
3.2.4. Sustainability	17
3.2.5. Key emerging issues/lessons from FAN Clubs intervention	17
3.3. WATER REHABILITATION.....	18
3.3.1. Results achieved.....	18
3.3.2. Impact and sustainability	19
3.3.3. Emerging issues/lessons on water rehabilitation	19
3.4. CONSERVATION FARMING	20
3.4.1. Results achieved.....	20
3.4.2. Effectiveness of approaches used	20
3.4.3. Impact of the CF intervention and sustainability	21

3.4.4. Emerging issues/lessons	22
3.5. NON-TIMBER FOREST PRODUCTS	23
3.5.1. Results achieved.....	23
3.5.2. Effectiveness of approaches used.....	23
3.5.3. Impact of NTFP intervention.....	24
3.5.4. Sustainability of benefits	24
3.5.5. Emerging issues/lessons.....	24
3.6. INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS.....	25
3.7. OVERALL PROGRAM CONTRIBUTION TO PURPOSE AND EMERGING LESSONS	26
4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS	27
5. APPENDICES (SEPARATE ATTACHMENT).....	29

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The EC funded food security and independence program was implemented by Mercy Corps and its partners SAFIRE and Zim Ahead in drought prone districts of Bunera, Chipinge and Chiredzi from 2007 to October 2010. It provided opportunities for communities to acquire knowledge and skills in a wide range of areas including public health and hygiene, nutrition, food production, irrigation farming and farming as a business that enhanced security of their livelihoods. This end of project evaluation was designed to an opportunity for institutional learning, growth and reflection for Mercy Corps, its implementing partners and project stakeholders in the different districts.

The program was considered to be rebuilding community assets base depleted by recurrent droughts and hyper-inflation experienced in Zimbabwe prior to February 2009. There was evidence that program interventions (gardens, irrigation, CF) were mitigating extreme hunger through increased production and diversity of options.

The inclusive and apolitical nature of the interventions (e.g. irrigation, FAN clubs) brought people from different socio-economic and political backgrounds to work together and provided practical ways for promoting healing in communities that went through a period that was often characterized by violent political conflict. Communities and stakeholder consulted recognized this spin off benefit of the program to communities.

The evaluation team concluded that the mix of interventions was relevant, target outputs were largely achieved and made significant contribution to the food and livelihood security of participating communities. The team identified key issues and developed recommendations that can be considered in the design of future programs aimed at improving livelihoods of rural communities.

1. Knowledge intensive interventions designed to build capacity of communities to manage their productive enterprises for example vegetable gardens, irrigation schemes and value adding processing take time and require a nurturing period where participants put into practice their acquired knowledge. It was evident that in a number of cases the three years project period was not adequate to achieve the desired effect especially in irrigation schemes.
Recommendation: The design of livelihood projects should have a 3-5 year project cycle that incorporates a 1-2 year monitoring period designed to nurture and backstop newly introduced practices.

2. The program was trying to orient participating communities into farming as a business however this requires functioning input/output markets. These markets are not yet functioning properly for example access to improved seed and fertilizers is still constrained in the rural areas country wide. Lack of these critical inputs would reduce productivity and returns on labor for these communities, this is particularly important for irrigation schemes that have to pay electricity and maintenance costs. Viable markets are critical requirement of farming as a business.
Recommendation: Strengthen the market linkages component of the program to work closely with, and learn from similar programs (e.g. SNV, CARE, Farmer Unions and commodity associations) that are working on resolving the same problem.

3. It was evident, particularly in irrigation schemes which required the community to make a significant contribution in terms of labor and local materials, that key program activities had to be properly sequenced to ensure effective delivery of planned outputs. Communities noted that the training of IMC and their sub-committees was a critical input in order to get the best out of the community contribution.
Recommendation: The program design should ensure that traditional/local authorities, IMC and their sub-committees go through organizational and leadership training to facilitate efficient and effective mobilization of communities for the task ahead. This should be complemented by development of a constitution whose provisions are broadly shared constitution.

4. Access to working capital particularly for the more intensive irrigation farming enterprises was noted to be a major constraint as farmers were failing to access appropriate levels of inputs to maximize crop yields.
Recommendation: The design of future programs should as far as possible incorporate the development of linkages with micro-finance programs or financial institutions that offer group lending facilities. (For example it is possible for a program to have seed money placed with an appropriately decentralized financial institution to kick start the micro finance lending.)

5. Zimbabwe is facing electricity supply problems which negatively affect the operation of power driven irrigation schemes.

Recommendation: Design and budgets of irrigation schemes should make provision for night storage facilities to mitigate the effects of erratic power supply in these schemes.

6. MC was the lead agency on irrigation rehabilitation and the management arrangements for on-site supervision of the Harare based consultant and community inputs. Irrigation rehabilitation had significant delays in its delivery schedule for a variety of reasons including challenges in the operating macro environment and community inputs.

Recommendation: Future designs should consider the possibility for more effective arrangements:

- by utilizing a locally based government irrigation engineer for on-site technical supervision and building local relationships that enhance sustainability of scheme.
- Implementing partners should harmonize messages going to the communities for example on business training (SAFIRE & Irrigation consultant) to minimize chances of confusing the community or giving conflict messages.
- by identifying and ensuring that equipment for those tasks that are more effectively done by machines rather than manually are incorporated in the design and budget of the project.

7. The management of expectations and exit strategies from communities that have overwhelming need for development support is a challenge for development project interventions.

Recommendation: The community expectations and challenges of exiting can be mitigated by incorporating key milestones in the project design that show that the progress of the journey and changes in roles of project facilitators/promoters. *(The graduation and certificates used in the FAN clubs is a good practice although this was somewhat marred by lack prices for the winning garden contestants.)*

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. BACKGROUND

Mercy Corps Zimbabwe implemented a three year, EC funded Food Security and Livelihood Independence Program for vulnerable households in South-Eastern Zimbabwe targeting 15 wards in three districts namely, Buhera, Chipinge and Chiredzi. The project came to an end October 2010 and was required to undertake an end of project evaluation. This would provide an opportunity for institutional learning, growth and reflection for Mercy Corps, its implementing partners and project stakeholders in the different districts. The project has two key objectives:

Objective 1: Vulnerable Zimbabweans improve food production at communal and household level and reduce dependence on food aid.

Training and capacity building through Food, Agriculture and Nutrition (FAN) Clubs and farmer producer groups will enable vulnerable households to measurably strengthen their financial capital. Through nutrition gardens, beekeeping and processing of food and herbs at the household level, families will be better able to meet their own nutrition needs. Parallel activities to enhance marketing of agricultural produce and non-timber forest products (Baobab, Kigelia and Marula fruit) will lead to increased sales. Outcomes will include a more diverse production mix, increased yields, and income generation from surplus production, and viable and enduring relationships between farmers and markets for finances, inputs, services and produce. The program will also mitigate health impacts of HIV/AIDS including through enhanced home based care.

Objective 2: Vulnerable Zimbabweans increase household purchasing power through enhanced and sustainable livelihoods.

Access to adequate quantities of water is the single greatest limiting factor to increasing food security in target areas. Availability of water for agricultural production purposes will be increased by rehabilitating boreholes and constructing communal wells; refurbishing existing electricity-fed irrigation schemes; and establishing water point committees to manage and maintain each water point. With reduced reliance on rain-fed agriculture, households will be able to increase agricultural production through year-round cultivation. Long-term food security will be further enhanced by enabling farmers to adopt more productive and environmentally sustainable farming systems that improve yields and soil fertility. More specifically, this will involve introduction of conservation farming (CF), on a small but intensive scale, and agro-forestry, on a larger scale through the FAN Clubs

1.2. Purpose of the evaluation

This will be a participatory end of project evaluation of the Food Security and Livelihood Independence Programme that was implemented by Mercy Corps in Chiredzi, Chipinge and Buhera districts in Zimbabwe over a period of thirty six (36) months. In view getting independent opinions of the project the evaluation process will be led by an external facilitator who would work with and through the district stakeholders during the evaluation exercise. This will be a process oriented evaluation aimed at providing a window of opportunity for institutional learning, growth and reflection for Mercy Corps and its

implementing partners and the project stakeholders. Below is a summary of the Scope of Work of the end of project evaluation:

- Assess the relevance of the interventions in light of the current operating context in Zimbabwe
- Critically examine the methodologies and approaches used in key project activities, program quality and sustainability of project outputs.
- Assess impacts in terms of achieved results in comparison to the set targets
- Evaluate the cost effectiveness and efficiency of the interventions adopted by the project during implementation Vis-à-Vis the current context in the country

2. EVALUATION METHODOLOGY AND APPROACHES

The evaluation was undertaken in participatory manner with implementing partners providing inputs to the development of the scope work and working with the external facilitator/evaluator to refine the evaluation framework.

Each of the three implementing partners –Mercy Corps, Zim-Ahead and SAFIRE – provided a team member to the evaluation team. The evaluation team went through a session to build a common understanding of the purpose of the evaluation and to agree an itinerary for stakeholder and community consultations.

A program of visits was developed to ensure that the evaluation team met all the program key stakeholders and project sites representative of what the project was trying to achieve. Selection of site visit ensured that the evaluation team was exposed to a broad range of the project interventions.

The evaluation met with all the key stakeholder groups in each of the three operating districts and these included central government and local government authorities at district and community level; communities including beneficiaries and non beneficiaries; consulting irrigation engineer. Consultations with district field staff of the implementing partners were also undertaken to build a sense of achievement of the program. Focus group discussions were the main mode of consultations at the community level and open discussions with a checklist of questions was used for district stakeholders.

The team undertook reflection and feedback sessions in each district to draw out key messages and issues that the external evaluator built upon to produce the first draft report of the evaluation.

3. KEY FINDINGS

The findings are structured to provide an overview of the program and to address key issues in the TOR's by component i.e. FAN, irrigation, conservation farming and NTFP and the program's overall contribution to stakeholder capacity building and project purpose.

Overview

The political, economic and drought conditions in the operating environment were noted to have a significant bearing on pace of progress made by communities. For example the challenging political and economic environment (especially polarization and hyper-inflation) that prevailed in Zimbabwe prior to February 2009 greatly affected progress on the ground. In a number incidences stakeholders felt the effective program implementation period was reduced to two years. The troubled 2007/2008 period greatly affected procurement of project materials and opportunities to freely mobilize communities for the project especially during the first half of 2008, an election year.

The long distances between communities, poor road infrastructure, transport and communications facilities presented major challenges to effective project delivery and marketing of agricultural produce from these communities.

3.1. IRRIGATION REHABILITATION

3.1.1. Results achieved

The irrigation component was directly implemented by Mercy Corps and was planned to cover of four schemes but eventually rehabilitated three irrigation schemes (Zuvarabuda; Mutandahwe and St Joseph) in Chipinge and Chiredzi. **Why was the forth abandoned?** The objective of the rehabilitation was to ensure that irrigation communities have increased access to permanent agricultural water and increase their ability to profitably produce and sell under current market conditions. This key result area also included a component of borehole rehabilitation. The table below shows results achieved (ER4).

Key irrigation targets/indicators:
-4 schemes rehabilitated by end of project.
- 7708 households irrigating 20 hectares.
-150 boreholes rehabilitated.

Name of scheme	Size of scheme	No. of beneficiaries.	Estimated grain production assuming two crops per year.
Zuvarabuda	8ha	83	120 tons
Mutandahwe	23ha	167	200 tons
St Joseph's	19ha	110	200 tons

3.1.2. Effectiveness of methodologies and approach

How effective was Mercy Corps's approach of direct implementation for the rehabilitation of irrigation schemes?

The direct implementation approach of MC had two main components i.e. the design and supervision of physical works by MC and the local inputs by the smallholder irrigators. The MC inputs were led by a contracted consulting engineer based in Harare and complemented by a field based team and partners (SAFIRE, ZA, Agritex) while the local farmer inputs were led by the community based irrigation committees. The MC approach proved to be effective as it delivered two schemes that are already functioning and the third one is almost completed and should be functional before end of November 2010. It was reported that the MC approach delivered schemes at costs estimated to be half the costs of commercial contractors on a per hectare basis. Stakeholder feedback showed that the schemes are technically sound except for the issues of lack of a night storage dam at Mutandahwe and electricity supply disruptions which are being experienced country wide.

The direct implementation approach is appropriate for small scale community based irrigation schemes (+/- 20ha) that seek to build local ownership of the irrigation schemes as evidenced by the achievements to date. Stakeholder consultations showed that communities were proud of their contribution in the rehabilitation of the irrigation schemes and were confident that because they had put so much of their sweat they would not let the scheme break down.

It was clear from consultations in the functioning schemes that irrigators were already strides ahead of their non-beneficiary neighbors. For example irrigators in Mutandahwe articulated a number of benefits.

- Access to grain had increased through direct production of maize and from bartering vegetables for grain. Some farmers reported getting more than 4x 50kg maize from half of their 0.13ha plots of land per harvest. (Solomn do we have table with harvests from this scheme?) There was very little cash in the program communities and a lot of transactions were through barter system.
- Enhanced opportunities for income earning through the sale vegetables, mostly tomatoes and cabbages. (Table with recorded sales—Solomn?) Examples from Zuvarabuda- a total of 12 992 kg of butternuts harvested and sold for \$5 846,40. A cumulative total of 4731 kg of cumbers were sold and realized a total of \$946,20.
- Leadership and organizational capacity of the schemes and community as a whole had been enhanced through training and practice in organizing 167 members to contribute labor and follow a specified irrigation schedule. There were testimonies of how the scheme leadership was approachable, accessible and transparent as a result of their training.
- The development of constitution and putting it into practice facilitated understanding and enforcement of by laws on water use, contributions in cash or kind by members of the scheme. Members know that if they break provisions of the constitution they will expelled from the scheme.

- Skills and attitude on farming as a business had been enhanced in the irrigation schemes as farmers organized to access markets on their own.
- The use of local builders and electricians was seen by the communities as an effective way of enhancing local capacities to maintain the schemes after the end of project support.

Challenges

The irrigation component had its fair share of challenges especially the 2007/08 period when the project started.

- The direct MC program/community project delivery framework experienced relationship challenges that are described in detail in the project mid-term review report of June 2009. These challenges were ironed out in the second half of the project showing that both MC and the community had learnt from their experiences. The devolution of responsibilities to the field based office in particular the appointment of locally based irrigation technician significantly speeded up implementation of the program. The critical issue was to do with the institutional arrangements which needed to be decentralized as far as possible to enhance understanding, planning and delivery of agreed inputs (technical, materials and labour) between service providers (MC, SAFIRE, ZA, Agritex etc) and the communities.
- Communities noted that challenges were experienced largely due to poor communications between key stakeholders at the scheme level, however they recognized that these were resolved as communication was enhanced (e.g. through locally based irrigation technician) and capacity building efforts on irrigation management committees. For example at St Joseph the communities recommended that community contribution in terms of labor or kind should be preceded by capacity development of the IMC to improve understanding and organizational efficiency in future schemes.
- Significant delays were experienced in the irrigation component and the main challenges that contributed to the delays in the irrigation rehabilitation were to do with procurement of project materials in hyper-inflationary environment and copying with the bureaucratic procurement requirements of the contract. The year 2008 was particularly difficult, it was a general election year with its associated challenges and hyper-inflation reached its peak before the introduction of multi-currencies early 2009. St Joseph scheme although almost complete was still not functional at the time of the evaluation.
- The Program also experienced unexpected costs, for example transformers and imported pumps whose processes of procurement were drawn out and time consuming. This may partly explain the significant delays for example in completing St Joseph's scheme in Chiredzi.

- For the schemes that are already producing (Zuvarabuda and Mutandahwe) markets for vegetables is a major challenge. The major markets are in Mutare, Harare and Bulawayo all of which are far away and require dedicated transport facilities.
- In Mutandahwe the lack of a night storage facility was a major concern given the electricity supply disruptions that are being experienced with ZESA. The lack of a night storage dam will also be a major challenge for the St Joseph scheme.
- Irrigators faced the problem of access to working capital which limited their ability to procure appropriate agricultural inputs to maximize yields and achieve higher returns to pay for maintenance costs of the scheme e.g. electricity and pump minders.
- There is also an emerging threat to schemes downstream of the new ARDA/Sabot sugar estate (estimated to be 48 000ha) which is likely to use its financial and political muscle to have priority of the scarce Save River water in that part of the catchment.

3.1.3. Impact of irrigation rehabilitation

The rehabilitated irrigation schemes were non-functional since they were damaged by the 2001 cyclone. One of the key changes triggered by the irrigation intervention and its self help approach is the fact that communities have reclaimed/regained their sense of self help and the confidence to do things for themselves. Capacities to self organize have been enhanced as evidenced by the extent of the community contribution to the rehabilitation as well as managing the discipline required to take turns in using the irrigation water at the planned times. For example 167 irrigators in different land blocks in the 23ha Mutandahwe scheme all manage to irrigate their plots as planned, this requires high levels of discipline and cooperation which the intervention has forged in this community.

The total irrigable area for the three schemes under rehabilitation is 50ha and has potential to produce more than 750 tons of maize plus vegetables which can secure the food needs of more than 2500 households per annum. Although the schemes are only going into their third production cycle it is clear that they have significantly improved the food security situation of participating households in this drought and hunger stricken south eastern corner of Zimbabwe. For example irrigators interviewed at Mutandahwe irrigation scheme indicated that they got an equivalent of 400 kg from their 0,13 ha plots in their first crop and this contributed significantly to secure their household food needs.

The rehabilitation of irrigation schemes and business training provided by SAFIRE has engendered the farming as a business orientation in the schemes. Participating households testified that they were gainfully employed throughout the year and are just like anybody else working in other industries. Gainful employment has other spin-off

benefits like reduction of gossiping, prostitution and other anti-social behavior that are now evident in the participating communities.

There is evidence that the reliable production and diversity of vegetables in irrigation schemes has improved the nutritional status of participating communities. They have access to own production and are therefore able to take sufficient quantities compared to the non-program communities who buy in vegetables with scarce cash.

3.1.4. Sustainability of benefits

Irrigators testified that with the knowledge that they gained, the sweat they put into rehabilitating schemes and the hunger that they faced in 2007/08 they would not let the schemes fall into a state of disrepair again. This self help capacity was evident as irrigators make their monthly contributions for ZESA bills.

The project provided two sets of the critical irrigation equipment i.e. pumps and motors for each scheme which should keep the irrigation functioning in case of one pump set breakdown. In addition the program worked with local technicians who are part of the schemes and would be available to provide services within their capacity. Relationships were also established with Hippo Valley and Triangle who provided tractors to plough and level the irrigation land within the schemes. There is potential to maintain these productive relationships.

The training of farmers in farming as a business was greatly appreciated by irrigators who now have own bank accounts and mechanisms for levying monthly member contributions to pay for essential services like ZESA bills and pump minders. With the knowledge that farmers have now they were confident that they would not let their schemes lie idle for such a long time (2001 to 2009) again.

It was clear that participation of the community in the rehabilitation of their own scheme through provision of labor and local materials was important for building a sense ownership and sustainability purposes of the scheme. District stakeholders and communities emphasized this point as key to sustainability of community managed schemes.

3.1.5. Emerging Issues/lessons from the irrigation intervention

- The sequencing of program activities is crucial for effective delivery of such community based initiatives as irrigation rehabilitation. Communities were clear that organization and leadership training for the IMC was a pre-requisite to mobilization of the community to provide their contribution in labor and local materials like bricks and sand. Training should be followed by development of a constitution to guide the development and utilization of the scheme.
- Programs that seek to build local community skills and capacities take time and do not always fit into tightly defined project delivery targets. The programs also require

the requisite community mobilization competences which balance the needs of communities and those of the technical service providers in the delivery process. Consequently a three year project cycle was considered inadequate to properly go through the capacity building processes and deliver on targets.

- Building a commercial mindset in smallholder communities takes a long time and yet it is necessary to make the irrigation investment worthwhile. If farmers cannot achieve commercial viability in these schemes it would be difficult to maintain the schemes in good working order. The SAFIRE business training in irrigation schemes goes a long way to meet this need, however the training was often provided out of synch with the necessary practice as scheme operations were delayed.
- The lack of viable markets within reach of these schemes would be a threat to commercial viability. The markets that are further afield, for example in Harare and Bulawayo require more reliable transport arrangements for perishable vegetables. There is also the added challenge of competition with cheap South African imports especially in Harare.
- Access to working capital and cash within these areas is a serious challenge that would affect the irrigators' ability to buy adequate agriculture inputs to realize optimum yields and returns on labour.
- Procurement procedures were noted to have presented bottlenecks to effective delivery of the project and contributed to the delays in the delivery of the project. In future there would be need to find ways of simplifying the procedures.
- A new threat is looming in the catchment area of these community based irrigation schemes. The joint venture between ARDA and Sabot is developing more than 48 000 ha of sugar cane and is likely to take priority over the use of the save river water and cause shortages downstream. This would affect the schemes that are downstream. At the time of this evaluation Zuvarabuda was already experiencing water shortage as the commercial estate upstream was damming the Save river water for its pumps.
- As the economy gets back to normal it should be possible to source irrigation engineering consultancy inputs from towns relatively close to the sites.

3.2. FOOD, AGRICULTURE and NUTRITION (FAN)

How effective was the approach and intervention?

3.2.1. Results achieved

This component was led by Zim AHEAD and it built on the work done with community health clubs (CHC) in the previous phase of the program. Zim-AHEAD had field officers based in Buhera and Checheche/Chipinge to facilitate delivery of this program in the three districts.

This component exceeded most its targets and the table below shows the results achieved in the three years of the project in the districts of Buhera, Chipinge and Chiredzi.

Expected Result (ER)	EC Food Security program Targets	Cumulative Achievements as of January 2010
<p>ER 1: 105 agriculture extension officers and ward facilitators have increased capacity to deliver more effective training and extension activities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No. of AREX (local agric extension office) officers training farmers in new farming practices [target: 45] 	<p>[10 in Buhera, 16 in Chiredzi and 19 in Chipinge] Target was achieved 100%. Agritex was involved as the technical experts in establishing FAN gardens and to assist facilitators to conduct FAN sessions</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 15 Environmental Health Technicians (EHTs) training households in new food and nutrition concepts [target:15] 	<p>MOHCW has suffered a brain drain resulting in having only 8 EHTs covering the 16 project wards who participated in the training</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 45 ward facilitators providing technical assistance for participants [target: 45] 	<p>48 facilitators trained and providing technical service to FAN clubs(15 in Buhera; 17 in Chipinge; 16 in Chiredzi)The facilitators work together with Agritex officer to establish FAN gardens and conduct weekly FAN session after the training. Target achieved 106 %.</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> % participants satisfied with agric and health ext. services [target: 90%] 	<p>12311 members participating in the FAN clubs[2159 members in Chiredz,5427 members in Buhera and 4725 members in Chipinge.] there is no project target on the membership. Membership is always more than the H/h as 2 or more members may come from 1 h/hold</p>
<p>ER 2: 6,120 households are producing and consuming a greater quantity and diversity of food on a sustainable basis</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6,120 households organizing into 102 Food, Agriculture and Nutrition (FAN) clubs with each club having 60 members. 	<p>[4795 h/h in Buhera, 2052 h/h in Chiredzi and 3905 h/holds in Chipinge.] the number of members differs from to club to club .Buhera district had the highest figures in membership .</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 15 of Min. of Health staff that improve food and nutrition skills and apply those as trainers for the FAN clubs 	<p>MOHCW has suffered a brain drain resulting in having only 8 EHTs involved in the project and covering the 16 project wards .</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6,120 households of FAN club members participating in the food and nutrition training component of FAN clubs 	<p>10752 H/holds of FAN club members4795 h/h in Buhera, 2052 h/h in Chiredzi and 3905 h/holds in Chipinge.]Graduations are in progress</p>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 45 of AREX officers that improve food and agriculture skills and apply those as trainers for the FAN clubs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none">
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3,060 of FAN club members (50% for each topic) participating in the (1) vegetable and herb gardening, (2) tree nurseries, (3) beekeeping, (4) food processing training components of FAN clubs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More than 50% have graduated in the 3 districts [Chiredzi...962., Chipinge 2550... and Buhera...still compiling the list.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3 of private sector suppliers included in the supply and delivery of inputs via seed fairs and voucher systems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none">
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 102 of FAN clubs formed and functioning at project end 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 127 FAN clubs established and functioning
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> % increase in the avg. value of production per participating household [target: 50%] 	<ul style="list-style-type: none">
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Avg. increase in the diversity of food and/or cash crop production activities per participant [target: 3-fold] 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 	

3.2.2. Effectiveness of FAN methodologies and approaches

How effective was the approach used in food, agriculture and nutrition training?

The key steps of the FAN approach involved the selection of community based facilitators by the community, training of the selected facilitators together with EHT's and EW's on the CHC and FAN curricula. In general, communities selected village health workers as facilitators to undergo training for club activities. The approach was holistic bringing together expertise from ZA, SAFIRE, MC, Agritex and EHT's into the FAN clubs and their gardens. These facilitators in turn mobilized community members to form clubs which provided a vehicle for on-going training and learning by doing as club members. CHC members graduate into FAN clubs. This approach was considered by community stakeholders as appropriate and effective for a number of reasons. Most issues articulated by communities were consistent with the 2009 findings of the mid-term review:

- The FAN club approach was greatly appreciated for imparting knowledge on public health and nutrition at the individual, household and community levels with tangible benefits for all the communities interviewed. Communities were enthusiastic to show how healthy they looked, how hygienic their homesteads were and how healthy their children were from enjoying year round access to vegetables and balanced diet. The evaluation team disappointed some clubs, for example in Buhera, as it was not possible to visit all the clubs mobilized for the evaluation.
- The public health and FAN training was considered practical and connected well with the needs of these communities. For example the majority of FAN club members were women who are the most concerned by sanitation and hygiene conditions of the household environment. They bear the consequences of lack proper sanitation as they care for children who are most susceptible to diseases related to lack of proper sanitation.
- The training approach provided for learning by doing, members attended lessons and went home to practice what they learnt in the group.
- The FAN club approach is inclusive and does not select according to age or standard of education attained. All members of the community were free to join. In some wards the FAN club facilitators could not cope with demand as more people saw the benefits of participating in these clubs and wanted to join also.
- The selection of community based facilitators was considered appropriate because these were knowledgeable about the communities and did not exercise structural authority to get people to adopt practices. Members adopted practices learnt in the club because they saw value in them.
- The clubs provided a forum where community or household innovations e.g. in sanitation, use of herbs or barter trade, vegetable diversification and processing could be discussed openly without fear of authorities.
- The approach has in-built self supervision mechanisms as members visit each other's homesteads to review what progress each member is making. In the community garden members allocate each other vegetable beds and it would be evident who is doing well or not. FAN clubs engendered a spirit of positive competition and learning from each other.

- FAN gardens provided practical demonstration and stimulus for members to go and establish their own gardens closer to their homesteads.

Challenges

The FAN club approach although very successful it also experienced a few challenges. Most FAN club gardens worked in close collaboration with Agritex however in a few instances the training in FAN clubs was not properly sequenced to ensure that Agritex staff were on board right from the start of program. This was however resolved as the program progressed. Training of Agritex EW's increases chances of continued support to FAN gardens when project funding comes to an end.

FAN gardens were developed in these drought stricken districts where year round water resources are scarce and in most cases these thriving gardens have increased competition for water resources in the community.

It was noted that in few cases the supply of materials e.g. seeds and fencing were sometimes delayed causing gardens to plant some vegetable varieties at the wrong time of the season.

Most development interventions whether in health or agriculture recognize the important role played by community based facilitators but the challenge is in the design and provision of incentives for that role without destroying the spirit of voluntarism and self help. Although Community based FAN club facilitators worked effectively, communities still raised the issue of incentives for these facilitators especially transport support as they walked long distances. Perhaps in future program designs consideration should be given to smaller clubs with a maximum of fifty members and the creation of apex association that bring together the different small clubs into a large group quarterly or half yearly. This reduces distances travelled, maintains cohesion and still benefit from cross-fertilization across villages.

There were issues around promises made during the program that were not met, for example cement for toilets and prizes for the garden competitions. Communities felt very strongly that failure to meet promises was not a good practice.

3.2.3. Impact of FAN intervention

Communities were able to articulate the benefits of joining FAN clubs and the knowledge acquired through the club training and these included improved hygiene, food and nutrition and income. Communities noted that there was significant changes in sanitation practices at the individual and household levels as even children were able to use the dig and cover system where there were no toilets. They now understand the links between diseases and lack of proper sanitation and it was not surprising that support with cement for toilet construction featured strongly among the priority needs articulated by these communities.

There were testimonies of reduced instances of diseases in the program communities, for example the clinic in Buhera ward 2 reported a drop in diarrhea from 25 to 4 over the past

two years. In most FAN club areas there were no reports of cholera, something that communities attributed to the effectiveness of FAN intervention.

The nutrition status of the participating communities was reported to have changed significantly as evidenced by reduced levels of mal-nutrition in these areas. *(No figures but observation from health/clinic staff at the Kushambidzika club garden site meeting in ward 2).*

There was a new spirit of cooperation, empathy and love within the participating communities as result of the FAN intervention as the training provided a mechanism for visiting each other and showing empathy for each other in times of need. The evaluation team heard testimonies of cases of support during bereavement and for OVC's in a **?number** of schools for example in ward 1 Buhera district.

HIV/AIDS education is a strong component of the FAN activities as evidenced by songs (murume wake wake – no sharing of men!) which carry powerful messages on prevention of the pandemic that were sung by the community. Participants testified about their status and how healthy they were due to eating well and ARV's showing high levels of stigmatization in these communities.

Although there are no quantitative figures there was anecdotal evidence of increase in access to a variety of vegetables in both individual and community gardens as result of the FAN club activities. Where available surplus vegetables are sold and bring in income into the household. The Clubs in ward one of Buhera talked of maize bartered for vegetables but there was no market for both vegetables and maize in their area.

3.2.4. Sustainability

It was evident from the stakeholder consultations that the FAN approach is a knowledge intensive program that has led to a number of positive practices in the communities.

The response of communities to the question of sustainability of the FAN interventions was that: "The end of program or exiting of Z-AHEAD will not take away our knowledge, our smart/clean homesteads and our local facilitators neither will they take away our gardens!"

The biggest threat to sustainability to these interventions is the shortage of water, already FAN gardens face competition for water from domestic and livestock requirements. There was a clear need for dedicated water sources/boreholes at these FAN gardens which provide an effective framework for people to work together and learn new things that improve their livelihoods.

3.2.5. Key emerging issues/lessons from FAN Clubs intervention

The review team drew out some lessons and noted some issues that can inform the next phase of the program.

- FAN clubs provide a practical and effective framework for building community cohesion as members visit each other and build confidence in each other to the

extent that members ask each other for forgiveness for past wrongs. FAN clubs offer lessons on how healing may be promoted in communities that have gone through traumatic situations as experienced in 2008.

- Communities expressed problems of accessing markets for both their field crops and fresh and dried vegetables. Some of the more remote communities with very poor road access, for example in Ward one in Buhera have problems transporting their produce to profitable markets. They also have problems accessing inputs within their communities for their farming activities.
- Transformational approaches to working with communities require more time; the expansion of FAN clubs to meet project targets may have a negative effect on the long term sustainability of FAN club activities. A number of clubs have well over hundred members which pose challenges of members travelling long distances to club meetings and community gardens. Effectiveness of the learning and doing processes would be reduced as the numbers swell. As indicated earlier smaller, coherent and self selecting clubs have greater chances of surviving and innovating as they remain more focused on productive issues rather than squabbles and factions that tend to develop in large groups. The program guide was to have 60 members graduating per club per training session.
- The use of community based facilitators with no structural authority in the community was seen as an effective way of creating conducive environment for learning and exchanging ideas without fear of authorities.
- These clubs are dealing with common property resources like water and community gardens consequently its necessary to create mechanisms which deal with rising demand for membership. There is potential for conflict (members and non-members) if community members are denied membership with no possibility to join and utilize resources in their communities.
- The commitment of the community facilitators was evident given the long distances they cover and the time they spend on community issues at the expense of their own endeavors. The issue of incentives to facilitators especially transport was still of concern to most communities. A sustainable approach is needed for supporting community based facilitators without destroying the voluntarism and community self help spirit.
- There was concern that the increased nutrition garden activities as a result of the FAN club activities had potential to lead to competition for water resources in the communities between livestock, water for domestic consumption and for vegetable gardens. There was need to explore ways of increasing dedicated water resources infrastructure for gardens.
- Management of exit strategies and community expectations:

3.3. WATER REHABILITATION

3.3.1. Results achieved

The food security program included a component on rehabilitating water infrastructure specifically repair of boreholes and protection of wells.

The program prioritized rehabilitation of water facilities linked to FAN/gardens and the development of water point committees. Targets were achieved as planned and the approach was considered effective in supporting the development of FAN gardens. However the main concern for communities was that not all gardens were covered and the competition for scarce water resources from other users i.e. domestic users and livestock requirements.

Table below shows boreholes rehabilitated and gardens served.

District/Wards	No. of boreholes	FAN Clubs/gardens covered	Annual or seasonal production.
Buhera: ? wards	75	31	12 400 bundles of rape
Chipinge-?wards	75	40	16 000 bundles of rape
Chiredzi- ?wards	50	25	10 000 bundles of rape
On average one bundle can be sold at \$0.50 if the market is not flooded			

3.3.2. Impact and sustainability

It was evident that borehole rehabilitation brought great relief to communities by enhancing ready access to water for drinking and productive purposes. Communities are now able to produce vegetables throughout the year and improve their nutritional status and income earning opportunities as indicated in the table above.

The development of water point committees and VPM's ensured that rehabilitated water infrastructure would be maintained and down time reduced to minimum levels of less than two weeks. VPM's work closely with traditional authorities to ensure that communities use rehabilitated water facilities properly.

3.3.3. Emerging issues/lessons on water rehabilitation

- Water point committees and village pump minders expressed the need for repair tool kits to support the maintenance of these boreholes as part of the rehabilitation program.
- The program does not seem to have followed up the issue of exposing communities to available options on water lifting devices made in the mid-term review. At all garden consultation meetings women expressed the need for water delivery systems that ease the labor burden on women that head load water for their gardens. It is necessary to expose these communities to available options so that they make informed decisions on what is within their capacity to self fund, for example through sell of their livestock or vegetables.

- Competition for water resources is the number one issue of concern in these dry and drought stricken districts. Communities expressed the need for dedicated water resources for their community gardens which have become a source of learning, year round vegetables, livelihood and pride.

3.4. CONSERVATION FARMING

3.4.1. Results achieved

The conservation farming component aptly called “timba ugute” in Buhera was led by Mercy Corps and it’s aim was to promote farming practices that better conserve soil and water resources in the districts of Buhera, Chipinge and Chiredzi. The target of the program was to get at least 8 members from each of the 102 FAN clubs to practice conservation farming.

The table below shows the results achieved:

Farmers practicing CF and the Average Yield per Hectare by District for CF Plots for Agricultural for Season 2008-2009 and 2009-2010

District	Maize Yields (ton/ha)		Sorghum Yields (ton/ha)		Cowpea Yields (ton/ha)		Groundnuts Yields Unshelled (ton/ha)	Farmers practicing CF
	2008-2009	2009-2010	2008-2009	2009-2010	2008-2009	2009-2010	2009-2010	2009-2010
Chipinge	1,600	0.260	0.830	0.150	0.200	0.170	0.210	360 ¹
Chiredzi	2,200	0.153	2,100	0.900	0.430	0.172	0.363	240
Buhera	4,200	1,500	2,000	0.227	0.500	0.210	N/A	400

3.4.2. Effectiveness of approaches used

The core of the CF approach is train lead farmers and Agritex EW’s who then recruit and work with up to 10 follower farmers per lead farmer. All farmers start with the standard 50m by 50m (0,25ha) where they are trained in the basic principles of CF.

The three basic principles of CA, as defined by FAO, namely

- **Minimum mechanical soil disturbance**
- **Maintenance of at least 30% soil cover using organic material**
- **Use of crop rotations and interactions**

These three principles combined with **appropriate agronomic management** practices result in better conservation and utilization of soil and water resources and increases in crop productivity.

CF farmers in the program got the following input packages for each plot holder:

- Maize 10kg
- Sorghum 2kg

¹ There is a spontaneous CF movement emerging in the Chisumbanje area of Chipinge not captured by these figures

- Cow peas 2kg
- Ground nuts 5kg
- Ammonium nitrate 25kg
- Compound D 25 kg

Although there were initial problems in the first year (as detailed in the mid-term review report 2009) to do with selection of farmers, the lead farmer/follower approach was effective and has been successfully used in other conservation farming interventions by other NGO's, for example under the PRP. The program trained 90 lead farmers and 45 FAN club facilitators that spear headed the CF promotion with the support of the MC team and Agritex. The program also trained 45 Agritex EW's in CF as well building relationships with ICRISAT which is one of the lead organizations on research in conservation agriculture.

The farmers practicing CF in these communities were able to articulate the benefits of using conservation farming practices. Women in particular noted that CF was appropriate for people without cattle for draught power as they do not need to wait to borrow oxen after others have finished their land preparation. In CF planting stations are prepared by hand over the dry season at a measured pace and in time for the first rains. The FAN clubs proved to be an effective vehicle for spreading CF in the program areas as it regularly offered opportunities for learning and practicing as well as the peer review mechanism that encouraged learning from the selected CF farmers.

CF was also seen as a way of rebuilding the copying strategies or asset base of communities depleted by drought and the hyper-inflationary environment in Zimbabwe that can be adopted by both resource-poor and well endowed farmers. The massive expansion in CF witnessed in the Garikanai area ward 27 of Chipinge provides clear evidence of effectiveness of the lead farmer/follower (farmer to farmer) approach.

The spontaneous expansion of CF suggests the current approaches worked effectively, however there are concerns around the sustainability of the approach of providing inputs to participating farmers. CF has been promoted in the country as part of the humanitarian and recovery programs which included agricultural inputs. Although there was anecdotal evidence of farmers practicing CF with their own inputs it is still to be seen whether farmers will maintain their CF momentum once input support is withdrawn.

3.4.3. Impact of the CF intervention and sustainability

Lead farmers and follower farmers who followed the specification of CF and were able to plan their land preparation and labor inputs over the dry season gave testimonies of increased yields from their CF crops and how CF had ended hunger in their households. For example there were testimonies of CF farmers that got as much as 15 by 50kg maize from their 0,25ha plots against an average of 6 by 50kg they require for own consumption. In Garikanai ward 27 Chipinge the evaluation team heard testimonies of

farmers getting 5 by 50kg of sorghum plus 2 to 3 buckets of nyemba from the same 0,25ha CF plot.

CF brought in a renewed sense of self help in communities as witnessed in the Garikanai ward 27 in Chipinge and ward 1 in Buhera- there was a sense that a useful traditional practice has been recognized and brought to life and was serving them well. In Garikanai ward 124 new and old CF farmers in spontaneous movement have consolidated their CF plots into a block of 30ha that they are protecting from livestock. Each farmer has an allocation of 50m x 50m plot in the consolidated block. This is an indication of high levels of cooperation within farmers and between farmers and their Mutape/village heads.

3.4.4. Emerging issues/lessons

There was growing evidence that CF increased yields and eliminated or reduced the hunger period for the practicing farmers. (see table)

The CF requirement for organic mulch is often a constraint to expansion of CF however in Chipinge the use of the pumpkin crop as an undercover crop proved effective. In one incident a farmer harvested 8 tons of pumpkins from his CF plot.

The Garikanai group in ward 27 Chipinge provides evidence of the effectiveness of the lead farmer approach and is emerging into a farmer field school with great potential to develop further into an irrigation scheme. The group is self organized and driven and would make more effective use of development aid and achieve greater impact on food security and livelihood independence.

The very low cattle ownership (less than 40%) in the program districts makes CF an attractive option to farmers. There were observations from the Chipinge team that an average family can effectively work 0,5 to 1ha under conservation farming and support of that magnitude can help households break out of the vicious cycle of poverty.

Stakeholders recognize that CF is labor intensive and considered by communities to be back breaking but the benefits outweigh the labor burden. There is however need for development or identification of more appropriate technology that reduces the labor burden particularly for potholing and weeding. The burden for these tasks traditionally falls on women and consequently the impact of the CF technology on women's demand for labor needs to be critically looked at.

Farmers in the areas visited generally face challenges of marketing their produce. Consequently promotions of technologies that increase productivity where the farmers are already failing to market their produce from conventional practices are less likely to thrive. This was evident in Buhera north. This may point to the need for a more value chain approach to promoting technologies that increase productivity of the smallholder communities i.e. an approach that looks at removal of bottlenecks in the input/output markets and production chain of smallholder commodities.

3.5. NON-TIMBER FOREST PRODUCTS

3.5.1. Results achieved

This component was led by SAFIRE and was designed to complement the irrigation, FAN and CF components to build the capacity of communities in dry areas to use their natural resource base to sustainably harvest and access markets of non-timber forest products. This would in turn contribute to the livelihood security of participating communities through consumption of own production or increased income opportunities.

Expected Result	Programme Indicator	Achievement at reporting date
ER 6: 3,060 households sustainably harvest and access markets for non-timber forest products (NTFP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3,060 households trained in NTFP harvesting and processing techniques 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 60 entrepreneurs trained on NTFP based enterprises from club members in the 3 districts. 1,200 households trained in processing and marketing indigenous vegetables
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1000kg of natural products sold through SAFIRE 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 321 kg of dried vegetables were sold out of the 429.75 kg processed. The rest was used for household consumption.

3.5.2. Effectiveness of approaches used

The key components of the approach involved community based natural resource assessments and training on the processing of indigenous vegetables in FAN clubs/gardens and irrigation schemes. The NTFP component worked with FAN clubs and their communities to assess available natural resources products. The strategy was to train facilitators and lead entrepreneurs who would in turn train others in the FAN clubs and build the capacity of selected groups to harvest and process commercially exploitable natural products.

The approach was effective in particular for the processing of vegetables and production of honey. All the FAN clubs/gardens consulted found the training on the drying of vegetables to be relevant and meeting their practical needs of food and income opportunities for the communities. More than 1200 FAN members were trained in the processing and marketing of indigenous vegetables. In ward 1 Buhera there were testimonies of FAN members marketing their dried vegetables as far afield as Harare. The FAN clubs were therefore an effective vehicle for not only providing training on the processing and marketing of indigenous vegetables but also supporting each other in marketing efforts.

Training on honey production was another input that was greatly appreciated by communities. All the honey produced was sold locally and there was still great demand for honey despite the fact the local honey cost more than in Harare. For example it cost \$5 for 350g jar in Buhera ward 1 and about \$5 for a 500g jar in Harare.

Some challenges

- Indigenous vegetables and fruits are seasonal and therefore it may be difficult to synchronize training and practice with availability of these fruits and vegetables.
- Assessment of NTFP in target communities showed that the quantities of indigenous fruits and vegetables were limited for commercial exploitation. In addition the market for dried indigenous vegetables was limited hence most of the vegetables were consumed as own production at household level.
- Entrepreneurial skills and access to appropriate processing technologies were a limiting factor to development of viable NTFP enterprises. The driers provided by the program were few and failing to meet demand; and needed to be complemented by building or strengthening capacity for local production of these driers. The same would apply to beehives.

3.5.3. Impact of NTFP intervention

The training and exposure provided to communities by the program on what could be done with various natural products reinforced the conservation awareness of communities to look after their natural resource base. There is an improvement in environmental management as communities better understood the benefits to be derived from ensuring that their areas have good natural vegetation cover.

Community feedback during the evaluation showed that honey production and dried indigenous vegetables offered distinct opportunities for enhancing food security and income earning opportunities. For example in Buhera ward1 there were examples of farmers that had more than 100 beehives each and were failing to meet demand for honey.

Year round access to good and high nutritive value indigenous vegetables was often cited by communities interviewed as offering them variety in their diets which they did not have before the program intervention.

3.5.4. Sustainability of benefits

It was evident that FAN club members would continue to utilize their enhanced knowledge of vegetable and honey processing within their livelihood systems. However there was concern that the program had not built capacity within the community to produce vegetable driers locally.

3.5.5. Emerging issues/lessons

- The wards selected for the program intervention are not endowed with natural resources that lend themselves to sustainable commercial exploitation. Ideally such enterprises should go to where the resources are available in abundance. In

the circumstances of limited quantities processing focused on household consumption and local markets.

- The focus on selecting and developing NTFP based community enterprises from FAN clubs may be too limited to develop commercially viable enterprises. There is need to explore opportunities for including local business persons in the development of such enterprises and to recognize and utilize their business experience.

3.6. INSTITUTIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

How effective has been the program's capacity building efforts to ensure effective delivery and sustainable benefits?

The program had a strong capacity building input across the different components designed to ensure sustainability of benefits derived from the program interventions.

The table below shows the extent of capacity building. (Solomn, Alice & Nyasha to complete table)

Program Component	Agritex (trained or exposure visits)	Health	RDC	Community
Irrigation rehabilitation	-? agronomists -?EW's -? Supervisors	-?EHT's		-3 IMC's and their sub-committees trained in leadership, organization & farming as a business.
FAN Clubs & Garderns	45 EW's			-102 clubs -? Community based facilitators -? Club/garden committees
Conservation Farming	45 EW's			-?facilitaors -? Lead farmers
NTFP				-?NTFP groups -? Facilitators -? Lead entrepreneurs -?Commodity associations
Bole rehabilitation				?WPC ?VPM's

How effective has the partnership approach in implementing the SOW?

There was evidence that the partnership approach worked and delivered effectively on the program targets. The results achieved across all program components show that the institutional delivery framework was effective as targets were largely met.

Overall stakeholder response was that the program was setting a good example of NGO's working together and integrating their efforts for more effective program delivery. For example the approach of using Zim-AHEAD to lay the ground through FAN clubs for other related interventions was considered appropriate and holistic in nature.

Healthy partnerships that deliver effectively depend to a large extent on mutual trust, commitment, benefits and clarity of roles and responsibilities of all partners. The Food security partnership has mechanisms that promote these practices through the MOU's, compliance support, partnership meetings and regular partner reviews to discuss progress and emerging issues and lessons.

At the community level the program works closely with government agencies despite the prevailing circumstances which severely curtailed the operating capacity of these agencies. Sharing best practices with other NGO's in managing the incentive system of working with government agencies and community facilitators at community level would be useful in addressing related issues raised by communities and some of the government agencies.

3.7. OVERALL PROGRAM CONTRIBUTION TO PURPOSE AND EMERGING LESSONS

The results achieved, stakeholder feedback and strong testimonies from the community suggest that program outputs contributed significantly to the common purpose of the program i.e. ***“to sustainably improve agricultural production, income and the productive asset base of vulnerable households in Chipinge, Chiredzi and Buhera Districts.”*** A few examples provide evidence of contribution to purpose:

- The grain production from the 50 ha of rehabilitated irrigation schemes is sufficient to secure the food security of more 2500 households going by current production levels at Zuvarabuda scheme.
- FAN clubs numbering 102 and involving more than 7000 households in the three districts now have access to diverse and nutritious vegetables through out the year. This has contributed to their food security and income earning opportunities, for example FAN gardens were estimated to produce a marketable surplus (surplus to household consumption) of leafy vegetables worth more than \$19 200.
- In the participating districts of Buhera, Chipinge and Chiredzi more than 60% of households do not own any draught livestock. The hand hoe based conservation farming technology which has proved to be effective in increasing land and labor productivity under the prevailing dry conditions. Note the spontaneous CF expansion in the Chisumbanje area (Garikanayi ward 27) of Chipinge.

- The program was knowledge intensive and managed to bring about notable changes in practices in public health and hygiene; gardening and nutrition and farming as a business at the individual household and community levels. *Taka piwa nhaka yedzidzo- we got our inheritance in terms of knowledge and no one can take it away from us! Takunda and Tafara in Chipinge responding to the question of sustainability of program benefits.*
- Although communities recognized the importance of herbs, agro-forestry and NTFP's these remained relatively marginal activities in the livelihoods of these communities. Further work in product and market development is required to derive commercial value from these complementary livelihood sources.

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The evaluation team concluded that the mix of interventions was relevant, target outputs were largely achieved and made significant contribution to the food and livelihood security of participating communities. For example these communities now have access to reliable water resources and year round access to diverse and nutritious vegetables and income earning opportunities. The interventions contributed to the rebuilding of the community asset base long depleted by drought and floods. This in turn has enhanced their capacity to secure their food and livelihood needs as well as cope with future adverse weather conditions. Communities considered the acquisition of knowledge and skills on the different livelihood options, nutrition; conservation farming and public health from the program as their lifetime inheritance that cannot be taken away from them.

District stakeholder and community feedback during the evaluation all indicated that despite the communication limitations at the start of the program the partnership approach (MC, SAFIRE & ZA) was an effective way of delivering holistic programs in communities. The evaluation team also concluded that the key strategy used by the partnership was to build the self help capacity of the communities to enhance ownership of interventions and sustainability of benefits was effective both in terms of costs and results achieved.

The team analyzed the findings and drew out key issues for recommendations that can be considered in the design of future programs aimed at improving livelihoods of rural communities.

1. Knowledge intensive interventions designed to build capacity of communities to manage their productive enterprises for example vegetable gardens, irrigation schemes and value adding processing take time and require a nurturing period where participants put into practice their acquired knowledge. It was evident that in a number of cases the three years project period was not adequate to achieve the desired effect especially in irrigation schemes.
Recommendation: The design of livelihood projects should have a 3-5year project cycle that incorporates a 1-2 year monitoring period designed to

nurture and backstop newly introduced practices.

2. The program was trying to orient participating communities into farming as a business however this requires functioning input/output markets. These markets are not yet functioning properly for example access to improved seed and fertilizers is still constrained in the rural areas country wide. Lack of these critical inputs would reduce productivity and returns on labor for these communities, this is particularly important for irrigation schemes that have to pay electricity and maintenance costs. Viable markets are critical requirement of farming as a business.

Recommendation: Strengthen the market linkages component of the program to work closely with, and learn from similar programs (e.g. SNV, CARE, Farmer Unions and commodity associations) that are working on resolving the same problem.

3. It was evident, particularly in irrigation schemes which required the community to make a significant contribution in terms of labor and local materials, that key program activities had to be properly sequenced to ensure effective delivery of planned outputs. Communities noted that the training of IMC and their sub-committees was a critical input in order to get the best out of the community contribution.

Recommendation: The program design should ensure that traditional/local authorities, IMC and their sub-committees go through organizational and leadership training to facilitate efficient and effective mobilization of communities for the task ahead. This should be complemented by development of a constitution whose provisions are broadly shared constitution.

4. Access to working capital particularly for the more intensive irrigation farming enterprises was noted to be a major constraint as farmers were failing to access appropriate levels of inputs to maximize crop yields.

Recommendation: The design of future programs should as far as possible incorporate the development of linkages with micro-finance programs or financial institutions that offer group lending facilities. (For example it is possible for a program to have seed money placed with an appropriately decentralized financial institution to kick start the micro finance lending.)

5. Zimbabwe is facing electricity supply problems which negatively affect the operation of power driven irrigation schemes.

Recommendation: Design and budgets of irrigation schemes should make provision for night storage facilities to mitigate the effects of erratic power supply in these schemes.

6. MC was the lead agency on irrigation rehabilitation and the management arrangements for on-site supervision of the Harare based consultant and community inputs. Irrigation rehabilitation had significant delays in its delivery schedule for a variety of reasons including challenges in the operating macro

environment and community inputs.

Recommendation: Future designs should consider the possibility for more effective arrangements:

- by utilizing a locally based government irrigation engineer for on-site technical supervision and building local relationships that enhance sustainability of scheme.
- Implementing partners should harmonize messages going to the communities for example on business training (SAFIRE & Irrigation consultant) to minimize chances of confusing the community or giving conflict messages.
- by identifying and ensuring that equipment for those tasks that are more effectively done by machines rather than manually are incorporated in the design and budget of the project.

7. The management of expectations and exit strategies from communities that have overwhelming need for development support is a challenge for development project interventions.

Recommendation: Future project designs should incorporate clear milestones that show the progress of the programme journey and changes in the roles and responsibilities of project promoters and communities to mitigate exit challenges and community expectations. *(The graduation and certificates used in the FAN clubs is a good practice although this was somewhat marred by lack prizes for the winning garden contestants.)*

5. APPENDICES (SEPARATE ATTACHMENT)

1. Stakeholders Consulted
2. Evaluation framework
3. Scope of work