

## Beating Hunger: The Chivi Experience

<b>Location:</b>	Chivi District, southern part of Zimbabwe
<b>Date:</b>	1991-1993
<b>Sector focus:</b>	Rural livelihood security
<b>Spatial focus:</b>	Village community and ward level within administrative district

### Bibliographical reference

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Kuda Murwira, Helen Wedgwood, Cathy Watson and Everjoice J. Win, with Clare Tawney, *Beating Hunger: The Chivi Experience*. London: IT Press, 2000. Chapters 4,5,6 (pp. 28-57) contain the methodological core of this participatory project, and they are available (with ITDG permission) in electronic form on the Provention Consortium web site.

### Abstract

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This was a very carefully executed project that sought to combine outside specialist knowledge and local knowledge in developing low cost, sustainable technologies for increasing the drought resilience of the local livelihood system. The project staff spent considerable time simply living with villagers and sharing their daily work as a way of developing trust and confidence. Group discussion using a wide variety of participatory methods (see below) identified existing groups such as the women's gardening group, with which in depth experimentation could be done. The overarching concept comes directly from the "Farmer First" participatory action research tradition.<sup>1</sup>

At the ward level, the project also involved the government agricultural extension service, so that some of the technological innovations came from that "outside" source (distilled and localized from the basis of international agricultural science and engineering, the experience of the CGIAR system world wide). One such example is the use of tied ridges that capture rainfall and maximize percolation into the soil. Other innovations came from local experiments with indigenous knowledge that was not universal. In this way "seed fairs" allowed varieties that had been bred by local farmers to be discussed and spread. Still others emerged as low cost, local versions of commercial technologies such as the production by the women's gardening group of their own clay pipe for sub-surface irrigation of vegetables and one man's investment in a hand powered wire fence making machine to produce garden fencing both less expensive than purchased fencing and more durable than the traditional thorn brush fence.

The project was also careful about evaluation and learning lessons from the process. As a result, the best of these practices have now been replicated elsewhere in Zimbabwe as well as the northern, drier part of Mozambique and the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa.

This case study will be of interest to any agency or institution working in semi-arid Africa. It is likely to have even wider application methodologically in rural development in most of the world.

## Technical description

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**Hazard/risk type:** Drought, insect crop pests (risk of livelihood insecurity).

**Type of assessment:** Hazard, vulnerability, and capacity assessment, although the range of hazards included was not as wide as in some applications of CRA that are more open ended and often reveal combinations of health, natural, technological, and social hazards (e.g. many of the CRA/ VCA exercises by national societies of the IFRC).

## CRA process

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The project began with a long period of observation of local agriculture and post harvest activities. Focus groups were then held to develop an understanding of vulnerability and capacity, and to plan specific interventions. Pilot efforts such as sub surface irrigation, production of insecticides from local plants, tied ridging of fields, etc. were tried, and when successful spread among other farmers. Evaluation was a recurrent part of the process.

**Methods used:** In depth background historical, institutional, social, and geographical research. Preliminary residential participant observation. Group discussions in plenary and in sub-groups using transects, farm mapping, problem trees, wealth ranking, and seasonal calendars. Demonstration projects discussed and monitored by the sub-groups. Home farm visits by representatives of sub-groups and subsequent discussion of potentially useful practices. Larger experience sharing events such as seed fairs.

**Was livelihood analysis used?** Yes.

**Was external specialist knowledge introduced?** Yes. Some innovations were introduced from the portfolio of Agritex, the Zimbabwean national agricultural extension agency. However, these were not simply parachuted in or applied by fiat from the top-down, but were rigorously tested by farmers themselves, with the experiments (or demonstrations) monitored by the working groups. In a similar way, local practices such as the production and use of pesticides made from local products were also tested.

## Vulnerability analysis

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Wealth scaling was used in focus groups to identify the poorest households, and they were encouraged to join in various activities such as the women's gardening groups. Special efforts were made to encourage participation by women.

## Capacity analysis

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**Resources available:** Financial resources: Comic Relief, EU, DFID, and HIVOS. Human resources: International headquarters ITDG specialist consultants; ITDG Southern Africa staff, specialist advice from Free University, Amsterdam, GTZ, Zimbabwean national agricultural extension service (Agritex). Local human resources: a diversity of farming experience among the local people including experience of White owned commercial farms, where some of the men had been farm laborers and local knowledge and experience. Due to the then active agricultural extension and marketing system, there has also been a good deal of experimentation by local farmers with non-food and food export or "cash" crops including cotton and sunflower.

**Limitations to capacity:** Low cash income; local rate of household savings; extreme seasonality and highly variable climate; reliance on remittance of income from migrant labor which – while providing an income stream – deprived the communities and some households of labor power and skill.

## **Action planning and implementation**

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**What actions were actually planned?** A large number of technical innovations in agricultural production and water supply.

**Were actions actually carried out?** Yes, mostly on an individual basis of adoption of innovations, but also some such as protection of seasonal dry river bed wells with concrete well rings, on a collective basis by women's gardening groups.

**Have these actions turned out to be sustainable?** Yes, at least until the late 1990s. However, the political instability in Zimbabwe and extreme hardships resulting in the South of the country have presented a challenge to the continuation and spread of this process. More data is needed to bring the question of sustainability up to date.

**Were there any unanticipated additional benefits of the actions?** Some of the poorest and marginal households in these communities were identified and drawn into the process; women's initiatives were strengthened and reinforced; some women became more assertive. Relations between villagers in these wards of Chivi district became more trusting of the government agricultural extension agents, and by extension, local government generally. Eventually a local person from Chivi district stood for parliamentary election and was returned.

**Were there any unanticipated negative consequences of the actions?** None.

**Limitations on action/ sustainability of actions:** Historically from colonial times this had been a neglect "communal" area as opposed to "high potential," former "White" farming area. There also had been a long history from colonial days of mis-applied technology forced on people by colonial administrators. After independence in 1980, this southern part of the country was seen as stronghold of the opposition party, and there had been some abuse of power, leading to a legacy of mistrust of government. All of this needed to be overcome in order for the project to be successful.

Unfortunately with the controversial expropriation of White farms that led to extreme economic hardship and food shortage there began from 2001 a national and regional crisis – complicated by drought – that will have been a great challenge to sustainability of the process. This crisis grew worse as the ruling government used distribution of famine relief differentially to reward those who voted to re-elect President Mugabe and punish those who voted against him, or were suspected of voting for the opposition.

## **Indicators**

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No direct indicators such as malnutrition and disease rates during a drought; however, indirect indicators in the form of increased household farm income, increased investment in farms, and high rates of adoption of the range of innovations developed by the project.

## **Contextual notes**

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**Existence/ role of prior or contemporaneous conflict?** Although the war of independence was over in 1980, some legacies persisted, such as the land hunger of many Zimbabweans, and expectations that independence would see the division of White owned farms. This agitation for land was particularly acute or vocal on the part of the organized veterans of the armed independence struggle.

**Role of displacement/ relocation?** In some parts of Zimbabwe, as in South Africa, or colonial Kenya, some farmers had been “removed” from areas that were declared for White farming only. However, in this area the large majority of the people were locally born, as were their parents and grandparents.

**Role of prior disaster & prior recovery attempts?** There had been a serious drought in the early 1990s, just at the beginning of this project. Memories of that drought and the suffering that resulted were alive and served to motivate active participation in this project.

**Significant historical, geographic, economic, political, or cultural issues that influenced this instance of CRA and its consequences?** Colonial and recent post-independence political history definitely shaped the context (see above). In addition, clan and extended family social organization and settlement patterns encouraged the kind of sharing of knowledge and practice that was essential for the project. Male labor migration was both a positive (income providing) and negative (denying labor power and skill) factor. This is a pervasive reality in the whole of southern Africa.<sup>2</sup> Geographically, this part of Zimbabwe is characterized by a highly variable climate, and the projected impact of climate change will lead to more extreme events in the future.

## Strategic notes

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**How has this practice of CRA influenced change in policy and practice at the national level?** Agritex at the national level began to include the use of participatory methods in the training of its extension agents.

**How has this practice of CRA influenced change in policy and practice at local level?** Local (district) level extension agents fit into the on going project and began to use participatory methods themselves.

**How has this practice of CRA influenced the level of organization and solidarity in the locality where it was carried out?** Yes. Based on early successes, the people of Chivi district created a Chivi Development Association and replicated their approach more widely. However, in many parts of Africa there is a tension between clan leadership and the younger and often female leadership of emerging local civil society and NGOs. There can be cooperation and complementarity between older and new leaderships (as in some cases in Ghana and Nigeria) or there can be strong tensions leading to disruption of projects (as in some cases in Mozambique, Kenya, and Tanzania). An open question is how clan leaders feel about this project in Chivi, and more follow up is necessary.

**Less divided along class, gender, age, ethnic lines?** Class (income) level divisions as well as divisions along gender lines may have been weakened.

**More divided along these lines?** No.

**Are the people living in this area more able to speak out on issues that concern them?** They may have been more vocal during the project period and until the political crisis began (see above). These days, they are very likely quiet and very circumspect about criticism of government.

**Have new civil society organizations been created directly or indirectly because of this practice of CRA?** The project sub-groups, and after a few years, the Chivi Development Association.

## Lessons learned

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- ♦ A fusion of outside expert knowledge and local expert knowledge is not only possible but feasible to obtain and very fruitful in reducing risk.
- ♦ Sharing existing knowledge among people in an area is an important part of the CRA process (example of “seed fairs” held periodically for farmers to share seed they select).

- ♦ A highly organized district effort involving high levels of local participation and control can prosper even during economic downturns and periods of political instability.

## Keywords

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Drought, rural water supply, agricultural technological innovation, livelihood security, appropriate technology, local knowledge, agricultural extension.

## Resource person(s)

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<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Paul Richards, *Indigenous Agricultural Revolution*. London: Longman, 1985; Robert Chambers et al., *Farmer First*. London: IT Press, 1993.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Colin Murray, *Families Divided*. London: Heinemann, 1980; Ruth First et al., *The Mozambican Miner*. London: Harvester, 1982.

## Beating Hunger: The Chivi Experience

**Location:** Chivi District, southern part of Zimbabwe

**Date of update:** 26 February 2008

### Background

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During 1991-93, Kuda Muwira worked patiently with rural people who had just come out of a devastating drought in southern Zimbabwe. He and the co-authors of the case study, drawn by a 2000 publication from Intermediate Technology Press, followed the progress of community based fusion of local and external specialist technology throughout the 1990s.

### Update Time Frame, Mode of Follow Up & Confidence Level

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Kuda Muwira himself was able to update the situation as of early 2008. He is still based in Zimbabwe, but because of the dire economic and political situation in that country, he works as a consultant in South Africa and Mozambique, where he has successfully replicated the methods pioneered in Chivi. The update is thus 17 years after project inception and 8-9 years since the observations that were shared in the case study. Level of confidence is extremely high given the in depth knowledge, background, and trust Kuda Muriwa enjoys on the ground in Chivi.

### Sustainability

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The Chivi community built on the momentum of the original Participatory Action Research (PAR) work by forming the Chivi South Development Association (CSDA) to spearhead development process in the district beyond the project villages. However, progress has been difficult. Yet the CSDA still exists and there is still a trickle into the organizational purse from children of Chivi residents who are now urban based in different parts of the country. These contributions proved to be inadequate to sustain the work of an organization like CSDA in a country with the highest inflation in the world. The hardships being experienced by both rural and urban communities affected the level of self-reliance in CSDA.

Little known internationally, the CSDA found it difficult to secure external funding from donors. The leadership of CSDA is not well versed in fundraising methods – a reflection of the need for capacity building of a different kind than took place during the original PAR work. Although the CSDA has not yet been formally deregistered, it is not functional at the moment. Plans are still under way to revive it once the political environment becomes stable.

Another contributing factor to the present dormancy of CSDA was personal agendas which some of the leadership started to pursue. There were individuals trying to ride on the back of the project successes in order to meet their own political ambitions.

Yet another contributing factor could be the fact that ITDG (now called Practical Action) withdrew support a bit early, given the fact that the CSDA was still in its infancy and the macro-environment was beginning to be hostile.

This means the influence of the project within Chivi has failed to grow beyond the initial community that was the focus of the project. However the level of self-organization in the project area remains high.

## **Actions implemented**

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A lot of activities are still present in the community and they have managed to maintain links with a range of service providers. The variety of drought-resisting and drought-escaping technologies that were developed have become mainstreamed and integral parts of people's livelihoods. Economic diversification has also been a focus of add-ons and continued group and individual action.

## **Welfare/security results**

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The recent Food Insecurity map of Zimbabwe drawn by WFP and FAO does not show Ward 21-Chivi district as one of the high food insecurity areas, implying the fact that despite the unstable political and economic environment the Chivi community (Ward 21 in particular) have maintained a high level of resilience to hazards like drought.

## **Replication of method/approach**

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With unemployment at 80% and inflation at 100,000% p.a., (February 2008), the economic conditions are not auspicious for replication in Zimbabwe, nor have they been for the past few years. Politically, the tight grip of Mugabe and his supporters and the violence surrounding opposition party activities or suspicion of resistance to his rule mean that civil society is highly constrained.

Nevertheless, replication in South Africa is taking place presently in Limpopo Province, and is beginning to spread to Eastern Cape and Mpumalanga Provinces in that neighboring country.

## **Lessons learned/open questions**

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1. Whilst rapid rural assessment has its place, this project shows that a considerable investment in time can deepen the PAR process to the extent that 17 years later, there is new generation for whom bottom-up/ top-down fusion seems quite normal in technological innovation.
2. Self-organizational capacity of poor rural people can be very high, and their efforts can persist even in some of the daunting economic and political conditions imaginable.
3. Donors need to think through very clearly their exit strategy – too soon is bad, but staying too long and risking dependency is also bad.

## **Keywords**

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Drought, self-organization, generational effects.

## **Author of Update**

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