Background/Risk

Zimbabwe’s development progress depends on the productivity of its natural resources, principally land, water, and wildlife. Yet Zimbabwe’s food, forests, and wildlife are in steep decline. Ongoing climate events, increased poverty, population growth, poor land use planning, and weak governance contribute to serious degradation of natural resources. Agricultural production by smallholder farmers is declining, increasing the food insecurity of rural communities.

As a result, Zimbabwe experiences extremely high rural poverty and chronic and cyclic food insecurity with high levels of undernutrition. According to Integrated Phase Classification analyses, nearly half the population is food insecure. Zimbabwe has struggled to meet its national annual cereal requirements and relies on imports and humanitarian assistance. Dependence on rain-fed agriculture, weak market systems, and periodic weather and economic shocks contribute to a tenuous food security situation for rural and urban populations. Years of political and economic instability and rapid population growth have resulted in a deteriorating economy with high inflation levels, further worsening the situation for low-income households as they cannot afford food in markets.

Most disasters in Zimbabwe are caused by water- and climate-related events, such as floods or droughts. As climate change increases the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events, the number of water-related disasters is expected to rise. These weather events cause disruptions in the availability of food and water and increased conflict among communities and between humans and wildlife. Mounting stress on agricultural systems and water availability will require effective and aggressive adaptation to sustain livelihoods and the ecosystems upon which Zimbabwe depends.

Program Strategies

USAID uses complementary, layered activities to build the capacity of rural households and communities to increase and protect assets, improve food and nutrition security, and conserve natural resources. USAID builds resilience by increasing agricultural productivity and incomes for affected communities, promoting business skills and market linkages, and improving nutrition and hygiene.
practices. USAID works through local partners and a set of communities to learn and iteratively design interventions. This approach includes building the capacity of local partners on sustainable natural resources governance to safeguard biodiversity and enhance community resilience.

USAID is also undertaking recovery efforts after damage caused by extreme weather events while working to mitigate the effects of changing weather patterns through the promotion of climate-smart agricultural practices.

**Activities and Strategic Partnerships**

In 2020, the Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA) introduced two five-year activities, Takunda and Amalima Loko. Combined, they target 145,000 households in the provinces of Manicaland, Masvingo, and Matabeleland North. The two activities work to improve food security, maternal and child health, agricultural production and marketing, access to water and sanitation, community risk management, and the empowerment of women and youth in rural areas.

The two-year Zambuko livelihood initiative aims to improve smallholder farmer production, governance of community resources, and access to finance and markets.

USAID contributes funds to the World Food Programme’s Food Assistance for Assets Activity that supplies food rations in exchange for participation in the creation or rehabilitation of community assets to improve livelihoods, while providing training in agriculture and health.

**Fostering Agribusiness for Resilient Markets (FARM)**, a five-year Feed the Future activity, helps smallholder farmers manage their farms as a business rather than for subsistence. FARM targets more than 20,000 households in Manicaland and Masvingo provinces, providing technical training to farmers to increase their productivity, strengthen value chains, and bolster crop and livestock sales.

The Farmer-to-Farmer Program, implemented by Cultivating New Frontiers in Agriculture, provides technical assistance by highly qualified American volunteers to Zimbabwean farmers, agribusinesses, and other agriculture sector institutions.

A partnership with the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center seeks to reduce the negative effects of fall armyworm on food security by providing smallholder farmers with alternative, ecologically friendly, integrated pest management options.

**Resilience ANCHORS**, a five-year community-based natural resource activity, targets communities next to protected areas in the southeast Lowveld to increase their capacity to sustainably protect and manage natural resources.

**Resilient Waters** is a regional program aiming to build more resilient and water-secure communities and ecosystems through improved management of transboundary water bodies.

**Evaluation and Learning**

USAID investments are designed to transition households away from the need for costly food aid and aid dependency toward increased food security. USAID uses the BHA’s “Refine and Implement” approach, which gives USAID implementing partners time to conduct formative research, pilot approaches tailored to the context, collect baseline data, and test assumptions to refine their activities prior to implementation and scale-up. USAID will continue to participate in and lead effective donor coordination in the agricultural, humanitarian, health, and natural resources management sectors. USAID works closely with the U.K. Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, the European Union, the Japanese Embassy, the Swiss Embassy, and others in agriculture and natural resources management coordination. USAID also participates in a Resilience and Food Security Working Group to coordinate programming and share learning.

Contact John Meyer, Senior Strategy and Impact Advisor, Center for Resilience at johnmeyer@usaid.gov to learn more.

Data: Data come from the World Bank’s 2019 Living Standards Measurement Study (LSMS) Surveys in Malawi and Uganda and 11 rounds of phone interviews conducted by the World Bank in 2020/21. The phone survey samples drew from households interviewed during the 2019 data collection.

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