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## **Zimbabwe's Way from Crisis to a Green Future**

Food insecurity is a significant issue in many countries around the world, affecting millions of people. One country currently facing this challenge is Zimbabwe where food insecurity is a big problem. People are struggling to find nutritious food and clean drinking water. Four out of ten people live in poverty, which corresponds to 6 million people. Half of those people experience food insecurity and the ones that are most affected by the food shortage are women (Sida, 2023). This paper will describe Zimbabwe's food insecurity based on the lack of sustainable agriculture. In addition, it will include solutions for developing sustainable agriculture in Zimbabwe.

### **Zimbabwe**

Zimbabwe is a country in southern Africa and mainly consists of highlands and mountains with savannas, tropical jungle and wetlands. The climate in Zimbabwe is highly variable, but the country receives limited rainfall, leading to droughts in many areas (Globalis, 2021).

Zimbabwe has a population of over 16 million people, with a high population growth rate. Two-thirds of the population live in rural areas. The country is a democratic republic with a multiparty system according to its constitution. In 1980 the country gained independence and since then it has been a one-party state where the Zanu-PF party has remained in power through abuse, fraud and violence (Landguiden, 2020). This has resulted in intolerance and political repression. Agriculture is a key industry in Zimbabwe. In 2018, 41,9% of the country's land area was used for agriculture. Tobacco, cotton, coffee and sugar are the main crops grown (Landguiden, 2020).

After gaining independence, Zimbabwe invested heavily in education, which led to the country being regarded as one of the most educated countries in Africa. Although the education was supposed to be free, fees were charged. During the 2000s, Zimbabwe experienced an economic crisis that caused the school system to collapse, making it difficult for many families to afford to send their children to school (Landguiden, 2020).

In Zimbabwean society, marriage and the nuclear family are important. A typical family consists of a man, wife and at least two children, but often more. There are differences between families who live in rural areas and those in urban areas. In the urban areas there are often better conditions. Most families in the rural areas lack access to running water and healthcare. The staple food in Zimbabwe is sadza which is made from maize. There are significant gender role differences within families, with women playing a subordinate role. Women are expected to serve and work for their husbands and families. Moreover many men have multiple wives. Women and men are legally equal in Zimbabwe, but in practice women struggle to uphold their rights due to the patriarchal nature of society, where men hold primary power. Violence and sexual violence against women are common in the country (Encyclopedia.com, n.d.).

In Zimbabwe land is of great importance for women and it can often be their only provision. There are laws that allow women to own land in Zimbabwe but in practice obstacles exist. One obstacle is that Zimbabwe has a patriarchal society where women are not expected to speak out publicly. In addition, they are not considered capable of owning productive resources. Women living in rural areas in Zimbabwe often lack access to knowledge and information about their rights and how the legal system works. This makes it difficult for women to take action to defend their rights (We effect, n.d.).

## **Challenge**

Agriculture is a fundamental industry in Zimbabwe and the country was once considered the bread basket of southern Africa. Before 1980 a portion of the population consisted of wealthy white men who owned large sections of the farmland of Zimbabwe. 6 million indigenous people lived off 16 million hectares of land while white landowners controlled 15 million hectares of land across 6600 farms. In the 2000s a land reform program was implemented to transfer land from white landowners to the indigenous population. The land reform turned violent with white landowners being killed. The new landowners who were meant to replace the previous farmers lacked the knowledge, tools and resources to manage the farms. They were unfamiliar with the operation of advanced agricultural machinery. This resulted in the collapse of agriculture to a large extent. Today, large areas of land in Zimbabwe remain unused. The remaining agriculture is primarily focused on tobacco, as it provides a higher income. This has resulted in reduced cultivation of other important crops such as peanuts, maize and millet. This has led to food shortage and high unemployment in the country. Sustainable agriculture has declined and food insecurity has increased (Landguiden, 2020).

Moreover, it is hard to maintain sustainable agriculture for those who live in Zimbabwe because of the increasing climate change. Higher temperatures and low rainfall result in droughts that threaten crops and water availability. Crops are also at risk of other natural disasters, for instance floods. It is difficult for crops to adapt to varying weather conditions, which leads to crop failures. The unpredictable climate therefore has a significant impact on the food shortages in Zimbabwe (Globalis, 2021).

Another reason for the lack of sustainable agriculture in Zimbabwe is that the country is in an economic crisis, where the Zimbabwean dollar has lost its value. Many Western countries do not want to trade with Zimbabwe because of the political stance there. The economic crisis has left schools and universities, that were once some of the best in Africa, empty. As a result of this, many people live in poverty. The country is threatened by famine and over 3 million people have fled (Globalis, 2021).

Sustainable and effective agriculture leads to a higher food availability, which in turn increases food security. Food insecurity affects everyone in the country. It does not matter if you live in the rural areas or the urban areas. Many rural residents migrate to the cities hoping for better opportunities. When they arrive, they find out that the basic services are unavailable and that the providing opportunities are diminishing (World food programme, 2019).

Women and girls are the most affected by the food shortages due to their status in the country (Sida, 2023). In summary, the lack of sustainable agriculture in Zimbabwe is due to a lack of education, investment in tobacco instead of other nutritious and edible crops, climate change and an economic crisis.

## **Solutions**

My first solution for achieving sustainable agriculture is to also involve women in managing the farms. It can be done by increasing women's awareness of their rights. The women have to get information about their rights to land and how the legal system functions. This would allow them to defend their rights through the law. Much land in Zimbabwe remains unused due to the land reform. If women also were to own land, more of it would be cultivated, leading to an increased amount of crops. This contributes to a shared responsibility between men and women, leading to higher productivity. Women's involvement in agriculture could also lead to a more equal society.

To get more gender equality in agriculture, it is important to inform about equality and women's right to land to children in school. If boys and girls are made aware of these issues from a young age, it can help to prevent a patriarchal society. However, there are a lot of children in Zimbabwe who do not go to school. Therefore the information must also include other ways, such as organizations visiting villages to inform women and children. Furthermore, it is important to educate the men about the benefits with women having land rights and responsibility in agriculture. The solutions do not impact the environment negatively as they contribute to a more sustainable agriculture. However, it costs money for organizations to travel and educate people about women's right to land.

An organization working with educating women about rights and equality is WLZ, Women and land in Zimbabwe. The organization operates in 13 of 59 districts and works with ensuring women's access to, control over and ownership of land and natural resources (Women and land in Zimbabwe, n.d.).

Bolivia has a similar problem as Zimbabwe with food shortages. Sida has a project in Bolivia with 2000 family farm businesses where they are strengthening women's land rights. 1800 out of 2100 families have seen improved results in their businesses. It has been shown that they have got a higher production, but also a more equal society. More women have participated in village meetings where important decisions about the local production are made. When women have gained more knowledge about agriculture and for instance learned how to use different means of production, it has led to increasing productivity (Sida, 2022).

Women and men can think and prioritize things differently. Hellen Akello is a farmer and educates small-scale farmers in Zimbabwe about cultivation. She says that female food producers often have more knowledge about food from the wild and better understanding of the local ecosystems in comparison with male food producers. The women grow a variety of crops while men tend to focus on one sort that generates more income. If the men do not see fast results they also tend to stop using that crop, while women are more persistent and patient (Sida, 2022). Therefore it is beneficial if women also get to contribute and take responsibility over the farms. In Zimbabwe, men have more rights than women in agriculture, and the country's primary agricultural investment is in tobacco. If more women get to be involved, it could lead to more investment in other types of crops.

In a sustainable agriculture the genetic diversity in the food production needs to be preserved. This can be done by establishing seed and plant banks with different crops (Globala målen, 2022). Therefore, my second solution to achieving sustainable agriculture is to create seed and plant banks. Seed banks, in addition to maintaining biological diversity, enable agriculture to adapt to climate change. If the cultivation is diverse with different types of crops, the different crops are more likely to survive in various weather conditions. This increases the probability that at least one crop will thrive and provide food. When farmers grow multiple types of crops that are being harvested at different times, withstand different types of weather, soil and irrigation, the risk of crop failure decreases (Sida, 2022).

Local crops are often more resilient to climate change. Those that have been lost can be preserved in seed banks and reintroduced. To know which crops that are most resistant and resilient to climate change it is important to increase the knowledge about crops in the villages. This can be done through village meetings where groups of farmers meet, exchange experiences and learn from each other. There they also can exchange seeds with each other and build up seedbanks. Small-scale farmers often have local knowledge about which crops are best to grow. An organization can assist by providing scientific knowledge and providing the farmers with seeds they can use and develop. The combination of scientific and local knowledge can lead to access, improvement and use of higher quality seeds that produce nutritious food. To create seed banks and have village meetings has worked in Uganda where they have a similar issue as in Zimbabwe. The farmers' income has even increased

(Sida, 2022). It costs money to buy different seed varieties and educate people about seed banks. On the other hand the farmers would most likely benefit in the long run as they get a higher production due to more crops surviving.

There are currently organizations working towards sustainable agriculture in Zimbabwe. One such organization is LVC, La Via Campesina, an international agricultural organization with 182 member organizations in 81 countries. They advocate for sustainable agriculture and run campaigns to defend farmer's rights to seeds and sprouts, end violence against women and promote agrarian reforms. Their primary mission is to improve local access to healthy and ecologically produced food. During recent years organizations have placed a greater weight on women's rights to land from an agricultural perspective (Afrikagrupperna, n.d.).

The third solution to achieving sustainable agriculture is to use sustainable methods and means of production powered by renewable energy. An example of this is to use a solar-powered water pump as a sustainable irrigation system for crops. This leads to the cultivation not being seasonally dependent and facilitates farming during drier periods, ensuring the availability of nutritious food during the whole year. It also minimizes the environmental impact of farming. The water can be collected in barrels from rainfall and the pump can be activated when the battery has been charged by the sun. This ensures that plants receive more water when it is sunny and less when it is cloudy. The pump incurs no operational costs, but there is a greater cost when purchasing the pump. In the long run, the farmers would likely benefit from this method because it does not cost anything to operate it. Furthermore it allows for more frequent planting throughout the year, increasing the production of nutritious food. Organizations can participate and assist with purchasing and installing the pumps. Plan International has purchased and installed a solar-powered water pump for a family in Zimbabwe, which has given positive results (Plan International, n.d.).

It may be difficult to purchase and install the pumps if only one organization is responsible for doing so. Barriers that could make it difficult for an organization to set up the pumps include high costs and the need for people with technical expertise. Additionally, there may be infrastructure limitations in rural areas, potential issues due to political instability, and challenges in the supply chain. These barriers can be overcome through partnership where different organizations collaborate in purchasing the pumps. They can also be overcome by voluntary support through grants or donations and voluntary work through providing education and training for staff in areas such as project management and technical expertise. It also requires good planning before they start the project.

Achieving sustainable agriculture requires multiple efforts. In this paper three solutions have been described; women's right to land, seed banks with various seeds and sustainable farming methods like solar-powered water pumps. My suggestion is for organizations to collaborate and together create a small community where these three solutions form the foundation of agriculture. The community could be self-sufficient and be a positive example that could be replicated in other villages. It would demonstrate that sustainable agriculture in Zimbabwe is possible and can improve food security. Organizations that could work on this are for instance LVC, WLZ, GAPWUZ and FAO. If people see that these methods work in practice, they will be more motivated to try to improve their own farms. This approach could also empower women by increasing their confidence and knowledge of their rights. However, this solution is complex and expensive. The solution requires strong collaboration between the organizations, for example distribution of labor and financial contributions. It would likely result in a more sustainable agriculture which affects the environment, society and the farmers' economy positively.

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