

VBUs are rural development at its best

- PS Jiri



Permanent Secretary for Lands, Agriculture, Fisheries, Water and Rural Development, Professor Obert Jiri tours Jabula VBU in Hwange

The Permanent Secretary for Lands, Agriculture, Fisheries, Water and Rural Development, Professor Obert Jiri has described the establishment of village business units as rural development at its best.

Speaking after touring the newly completed Kasikili Jabula Village Business Unit which he commissioned in Hwange in July, the Prof. Jiri said, "This is rural development at its best. In this dry area, falling under Agro-ecological region 5B, we see the enablement and upliftment of the community due to the availability of water, and establishment of a solar powered irrigation scheme. We say this is a village business unit, they say this is their irrigation scheme. The impact of this 1 hectare solar powered irrigation scheme is immense in this rural area."

He added, "The villagers here have already started to harvest and their first crop has yielded more than US\$4000 in this village. If that is not impact, then nothing can be more impactful than this. We are seeing great organization of the villagers, upliftment of livelihoods and also provision of adequate food for their own households. Nutrition here is good and no one here suffers from malnutrition, not only that, their lives have been uplifted from the proceeds of this village business unit. The impact of the

CONTENTS

- 1 - VBUs are Rural Development at its Best - PS Jiri
- 3 - Watering life - Jabatshaba VBU brings better nutrition and increased incomes
- 5 - Four schemes undergo rehabilitation... 246 hectares brought under irrigation
- 6 - More than just roads... SACP pioneers Green Roads for Water initiative
- 8 - SACP activities dovetail with AFSTS –CD Bwenje
- 9 - Kasikili Jabula hosts exchange visit for 7 VBUs
- 10 - Testimonials from Jabatshaba VBU learning event
- 12 - SACP visits ARDA established VBUs in exchange visit
- 13 - Jabatshaba VBU hosts 7 VBUs for exchange visit
- 15 - SACP supports successful tomato demo plot in Mutoko
- 16 - Jabatshaba extension officer shines in National Extension officer competitions
- 17 - Growing sorghum in Hwange – The story of Nambikwa Ncube

Presidential Rural Development Programme is seen right here as we journey towards 2030."

One of the beneficiaries of the VBU, Lillian Sibanda commented, "We are now generating income from the garden produce, which we are using to pay school fees. Additionally, the solarisation of this borehole by SACP has reduced the distance that our livestock used to travel to Zambezi River for water and minimized instances of stock theft by cattle rustlers in the border areas. We planted okra, spinach, covo, carrots, and garlic, with a dedicated nutrition corner for family consumption. This garden serves as a source of relish for neighbours."



Kasikili Jabula VBU extension officer, Martha Chikava (centre) takes PS Jiri (in spectacles) on a tour of the garden while SACP district extension officer, Albert Ncube (extreme left) looks on

A traditional leader in the area, Christopher Tshuma said, "The community now has an easier life because of the support we received from Government. We used to access water from a borehole in this garden but it was a bush pump. After the SACP intervention, the garden was expanded and resultantly, food insecurity has decreased. In past seasons, it was quite difficult but now have readily available relish from that nutrition corner



Its now easier to water our cattle. They used to walk about 5km to the nearest water point or sometimes even more. Some of the cattle would go missing after being eaten by wild animals. Because of SACP, we now water our cattle in the drinking trough that is part of this VBU



Watering life - Jabatshaba VBU brings better nutrition and increased incomes



Two women prepare carrots for sale at Jabatshaba VBU

Amid the tall Mukwa trees growing from the powdery Kalahari sands, Lucy Moyo makes her way to the east of her grass thatched home. A hundred metres later, the Kalahari sands and the Mukwa trees give way to a little clump of Mopane trees and a mixture of the Kalahari and clay soils. The fenced portion with different vegetables, flourishing and green amid the grey, bare trees, devoid of their leaves is difficult to ignore. Two men and a woman are operating the drip system in the garden.

This is Jabatshaba Village Business Unit, 50 km north-west of Lupane, the provincial capital of Matabeleland North. The multi-purpose water point, popularly known as a Village Business Unit (VBU) was established for the rural community by the Smallholder Agriculture Cluster Project (SACP) co-financed by the Government of Zimbabwe, the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) and the OPEC Fund for International

Development (OFID).

Jabatshaba is one of the seven VBUs established by the project in the Lupane district, which falls in Agro-ecological Region 5 characterised by very hot temperatures, erratic rains and worsened by the predominantly Kalahari sands in the area.

Lucy Moyo, the Chairlady for the Jabatshaba Village Business Unit said, "For us this garden brings hope for better incomes which will enable us to send our children to schools. As women, we also hope that this garden will enable us to earn income and stop relying entirely on our husbands"

The beneficiaries had started realizing an income from the village business unit. After planting the first cycle of crops which included cabbages, tomatoes as well as carrots and rape which formed the nutrition corner, the farmers realized US\$6 431.00.

The farmers harvested 636 buckets of tomatoes which they sold for prices ranging from US\$4 to US\$7 depending on the tomato sizes and quality and made a total income of US\$3 672.00. Out of the 3 332 heads of cabbage, making an income of US\$2559."

The garden already had a plan for maintenance where farmers saved 10% of their income. This will be used for any repairs to both the water point and the garden. The garden had not only provided income but had also improved nutrition in the village. The farmers harvested and shared 120 cabbages and 120 buckets of tomatoes for household consumption. In addition to the crops in the commercial plot, the farmers cultivated carrots and leafy green vegetables which were shared among households. These were however, more than adequate for the farmers who were selling the surplus to nearby boarding schools, Mabhikwa and Fatima High Schools.

For the community the intervention had also brought other benefits since water is scarce, especially during the dry months after the rainy season. The intervention had made it easier and faster to access water for the community.

Lucy Moyo added that, "Before this intervention, it was very hard to operate this borehole. It had 16 pipes and was very heavy. Women were forced to pump as groups as one person was not able to operate the borehole. Now, we just open the taps and fetch water, there are less conflicts over water and watering livestock. Before SACP, community members spent a lot of time at the water point, and there were endless arguments over who came to the borehole first. This water point has made it easier for all community members including the elderly and PWDs to easily access water."

The borehole had also ensured ease of use for vulnerable members of the community such as the elderly and Persons with Disabilities. Thembelani Ndlovu, the Vice Chairperson of the VBU who has a disability added, "For some of us who have disability, this intervention has made a positive difference. We are no longer pumping water from the borehole but we are now fetching water from the taps. This is less strenuous for us and the elderly. This SACP intervention has enabled us to water the livestock as PWDs since the technology is no longer laborious."



Four schemes undergo rehabilitation... 246 hectares brought under irrigation

The Smallholder Agriculture Cluster Project has begun rehabilitation of irrigation schemes with four schemes under rehabilitation for the year 2025. The total hectarage that will be brought under rehabilitation will total 246 hectares.

The four schemes include Nhakayedu Irrigation Scheme, in Kwekwe where the project had rehabilitated 20 hectares. The scheme which is benefiting 28 farmers was established in 2014 by the Government and at design, it used a single hose reel for over-head irrigation. The scheme experienced frequent breakdown of the hose reel, which came without any spare parts resulting in its complete breakdown in 2019. This farmers resorted to hiring semi-portable sprinklers to irrigate 6ha.

The scope of work under rehabilitation by SACP includes the change of the infield system from hose-reel to semi-portable sprinkler to irrigate the 20 hectares as well as the supply and installation of a standby pumping unit.

The project has also started rehabilitation of Chipiri Irrigation Scheme in Muzarabani District in Mashonaland Central where the project is installing four centre pivots and extending the existing pump house. The scope of works also includes installation of a transformer and an LT line, supply of portable water for the community and the rehabilitation of a 2.6km last mile feeder road.



One of the centre pivots at Chipiri undergoing rehabilitation in Chipiri



Replacement of a transformer at Chipiri Irrigation Scheme

The scheme had not been rehabilitated since and experienced frequent pump breakdown due to old and worn-out pumps. The prolonged inactivity from December 2023 resulted in the vandalism of the transformer and the loss of infield equipment such as laterals and sprinklers. The scheme also experienced leakages along the mainline resulting in low pressure in the scheme.

In Mashonaland East, the project is rehabilitating Mug Ivhu Inhaka Irrigation Scheme in Murehwa, which was established by Government under the Agribank Facility in 2003. The 60 hectare scheme, which has 128 beneficiaries is experiencing a change of infield system from semi-portable sprinkler to centre pivots using the existing conveyance line as well as the supply and installation of new pumping unit.

The transformer in the irrigation scheme was struck by lightning in 2017, and farmers managed to source another one which was installed through the power

utility in 2023. The farmers do not have sufficient infield equipment as it was vandalized during the period of inactivity from 2017 to 2022.

The project is also rehabilitating Mamina Irrigation Scheme in Mhondoro Ngezi established by the Government of Zimbabwe in 2010.

There was no rehabilitation of the irrigation scheme since its inception and the scheme operated in 2016 before breaking down shortly after. The long period of non-functionality of the scheme resulted in vandalism of the transformer and the theft of in-field equipment that included laterals and sprinklers.

The 50 hectare irrigation scheme has 87 beneficiaries with potential for increase after its rehabilitation. The rehabilitation will see a change of in-field system from semi-portable sprinkler to centre pivots.



Rehabilitation of the last mile feeder road in progress in Mamina Irrigation Scheme

More than just roads... SACP pioneers Green Roads for Water initiative

The Smallholder Agriculture Cluster Project is pioneering the Green Roads for Water initiative in the road network that it is rehabilitating under its Climate Proofed Value Chain Infrastructure initiative. This follows training of engineers in July by Metameta,

One of the most impactful interventions is expected to come from road rehabilitation that will link the scheme with the main road, a distance of about 2km.

The farmers explained the challenges that they had faced due to the absence of a road and a bridge to cross the Ngezi River.

These which included loss of horticulture crops during the rainy season due to the inaccessibility of markets, failure to access schools, a clinic and grinding mills during the rainy season when the Ngezi River is in flood.

based in Nairobi, Kenya and supported by a civil engineer from Makueni County, Kenya.

Thirty engineers drawn from the Smallholder Agriculture Cluster Project, the Rural Infrastructure

Development Agency (RIDA), the Department of Irrigation and the Zimbabwe National Water Authority (ZINWA) and rural district councils (RDCs) underwent a five day training course which included in-class training and a practical session.

The Green Roads for Water intervention will be implemented in the 89km of roads currently under rehabilitation and construction under [Smallholder Agriculture Cluster Project](#). RIDA which is responsible for the construction of the majority of Zimbabwe's road network expressed interest in adopting the intervention in both SACP and non-SACP provinces.

The Green Roads for Water Initiative aims to transform the way roads are built and maintained all over the world by incorporating water management and re-greening in the design and construction of roads. The aim is to improve livelihoods and resilience of communities living around roads and reduce the negative impacts such as erosion, flooding, sedimentation, and dust while improving the climate resilience of road infrastructure itself and reduce water-related road damage. The advantages of intervention include;

- reduced erosion on the roads
- reduced demands for maintenance which

- reduces requirements for funding directed at road maintenance
- availability of water for agriculture for roadside farming communities
- ground water recharge

The initiative has been implemented in countries such as Bangladesh, Bolivia, China, Ethiopia, Kenya, Liberia, Mozambique, Nepal, Portugal, Sudan, Tajikistan, Uganda, Yemen, and Zambia. During the training, experiences and lessons learnt were drawn from both Makueni County and Ethiopia where the initiative has been successfully implemented. Water harvested from the road network has been used for agricultural activities as well as recharging the ground water system for roadside communities.

The following lessons were drawn from the training;

- Success of the intervention requires stakeholder engagement
- Through water harvesting, the intervention has potential to avail water for agriculture use.
- The intervention can also be useful in the recharge of groundwater systems
- There are opportunities to for environmental conservation such as tree and grass planting on the roadsides.



Engineers and the Mamina community take part in a transect walk as part of the Green Roads for Training Initiative in Mamina Irrigation Scheme, Mhondoro Ngezi district

SACP activities dovetail with AFSTS –CD Bwenje

The activities of the Smallholder Agriculture Cluster Project dovetail, with the Agriculture Food Systems and Transformation Strategy, says Chief Director Clemence Bwenje. Speaking at this year's Bi-annual review workshop in July, the Chief Director who is responsible for Business Development, Markets and Trade in the Ministry of Lands, Agriculture, Fisheries, Water and Rural Development, SACP's infrastructural development which includes establishment of village business units, rehabilitation of irrigation schemes and last mile feeder roads sought to drive rural transformation. He noted that this was in tandem with the Ministry's Rural Development 8.0 which seeks to develop 35 000 village business units across the country.

SACP has developed 70 out of its targeted 100 water points, while the remaining 30 are undergoing water capacity tests to ensure adequate water supply for the business units. Four irrigation schemes were earmarked for rehabilitation in 2025 and so far, Nhakayedu Irrigation Scheme in Kwekwe was completed in June 2025. Three other schemes, Chipiri (Muzarabani district), Mamina (Mhondoro Ngezi) and Mug Ivhu Inhaka are under rehabilitation. The total area expected to be brought under irrigation for the year will total 246 hectares.

Under its Inclusive Value Chain Component, the project will disburse matching grants to 150 Agriculture Producer Groups that qualified under the first call for Expressions of Interest. Additionally, the project expects to avail funds for the Value Chain Lead Enterprises that applied for funding under SACP.



Chief Director responsible for Business Development, Markets and Trade, Mr Clemence Bwenje

Mr Bwenje also applauded the funding model by IFAD which he said supported government vision of economic development and emancipation of smallholder farmers. The Chief Director expressed appreciation of the support received from the project towards policy activities, which he said were aimed ensuring the ease of doing business within the sector.



Women tend to a thriving tomato crop at Mabhikwa VBU, in Lupane, which completed under SACP

KASIKILI JABULA HOSTS EXCHANGE VISIT FOR 7 VBUS



Kasikili Jabula VBU Secretary, Moyo leads farmers from other VBUs during the learning events

Kasikili Jabula Village Business Unit in Hwange hosted an exchange visit for farmers from seven village business units in the district. The visiting village business units (VBUs) included Kalinda, Nabushome, Magoli, Sialwindi, Dingani, Tontola and KaBhata. Five farmers and an agricultural business advisor from each VBU attended the training which was held in July.

The exchange visit was led by the Jabula Village Business Unit Committee, the resident extension officer, Martha Chikava and the SACP Climate Smart Agriculture Specialist, Ottilia Mabvongwe. The VBU which is now in its second crop cycle was established in June 2024. Before the SACP intervention, the VBU which was 70m x 70m had no irrigation system, forcing villagers to irrigate using buckets.

During the exchange visit, VBU Secretary, Mr Albert Moyo said during the first crop cycle, members of the VBU had cultivated cabbage, maize and tomatoes. He also explained that the VBU has established a 0.25 hectare nutrition corner from which they cultivated green vegetables, onions, carrots. The secretary noted that as a result of the intervention by SACP, VBU members were now food secure and also able to supply nearby schools with vegetables to support the schools feeding programme, complimenting Government's efforts which was supplying grain used to prepare the staple food, isitshwala.

Moyo also added that all the crops grown in the VBU which included okra, spinach, cabbage, carrots and maize already had a buyer. The area cultivated for each crop was a response to the demands of the market in the nearby resort town of Victoria Falls. The off taker for the VBU visited the garden every week to pick up vegetables for sale in Victoria Falls.

Questions from other visiting VBUs centered on the pest control regime, which farmers from Jabula explained was a weekly exercise interchanging different pesticides. Regarding the carrot crop in the garden, Moyo explained that they were planning to thin out the carrots as they were crowded and risked producing small carrots. Extension staff also cautioned against the use of manure when planting carrots, warning that the practice resulted in carrots having two roots or being hairy.

There was also emphasis to maximize the utilization of land by planting two lines of crops per bed. Extension officers advised that carrots could not be transplanted as the process of uprooting them could disturb their shape, further emphasizing on adequate land preparation for the carrots to allow growth of the carrot roots.

Farmers at Jabula also indicated that they had planted garlic for the first time after a learning visit to Manicaland Province. Moyo explained that crops like garlic and onion were also useful as methods of pest control as they were not prone to pests compared to other crops. The first crop would not be sold but used as seed multiplication, he added. Extension officers also emphasized the use of integrated pest management instead of relying solely on pesticides in order to minimize the use of pesticides and chemicals on crops.

Extension officers and agronomists also emphasized the correct way of planting when using drip irrigation, advising farmers that they could plant on the sides of the drip lines as opposed to planting directly under the drip lines. This would enable farmers to full utilize the beds irrigated by the drip line. Farmers were also encouraged to use manure when cultivating the crop.

Farmers also shared notes on the irrigation schedule

in the garden which included irrigating their crop for twenty minutes per block.



SACP Climate Smart Agriculture Specialist, Ottilia Mabvongwe weighs in with some advice during the visit.

Testimonials from Jabatshaba VBU learning event



Above - Sithembiso Mahlangu- Mabhikwa VBU chairperson

I am from Mabhikwa VBU. We learnt a lot from today's learning event. Our first crop was butternut and carrot but the two crops did not do well. We did not have any knowledge on how to grow butternut which requires a lot of nutrients. We are grateful to Caroline Lumphahla who is the extension officer at this VBU and also happens to be resident in the same ward as ours. She invited us here to come here a few weeks ago to see the crops being grown here. As a result of her encouragement, we have planted a cabbage crop after taking notes from this VBU. We also have an onion nursery that we will transplant next Monday. We are confident that after this learning event, our cabbage will do well. As farmers we have also learnt about the importance of tree planting which we are going to adopt at our VBU in Mabhikwa.

VBU2

What I found particularly useful is the way the nurseries are being established here at Jabatshaba. When we go back to our VBU, we are going to improve the way we were setting up our nursery. At our VBU, we slight challenges with managing water. However, we learnt that we need to have irrigation schedule and received guidelines that we need to follow in irrigating each bloc as well as having a schedule that will ensure water is available to all water point users including the garden.



What I learnt here was the need to religiously inspect the crop for pests, especially cabbage. We also got information that we need to make sure there are no offshoots in the cabbage crop. Our first cabbage crop was affected by offshoots because were not vigilant



Mr Leonard Ncube from Rest Camp VBU

in inspecting for those offshoots. We now know what to do and we hope that our next cabbage crop will give us a better yield. Even though we have not cultivated tomatoes, we are now aware of the required spacing between plants as well as ensuring that as the plants fruit, they are supported through trellising.

What I learnt from the experiences of the farmers



Sibongile Dube, Chairperson of Sikhwehle VBU

here who grew cabbage is the cracking of the cabbage. Ours is also cracking at our VBU but we did not know what caused the challenge. We now realise that we have delayed in harvesting it and we will immediately harvest it and start selling as soon as we go back to our VBU.



Farmers and extension officers take notes

SACP visits ARDA established VBUs in exchange visit



As part of the knowledge Management activities meant to promote learning and to create efficiencies in project implementation, SACP visited VBUs established in selected districts through the Ministry of Lands, Agriculture, Fisheries, Water and Rural Development. The purpose of the visit was to promote peer learning between the project and partners that have implemented the intervention.

The project officers visited Gosha Business Unit in Goromonzi District. At this site, which is one hectare, the membership stood at 66, with the majority being women, whose membership stood at 60. There were no youths in the Village Business Unit. The VBU, established in October 2024 had interventions that included borehole drilling, installation of water tanks, solar panels, laying of a drip irrigation system and establishment of fish ponds. Next to the fish pond was a cattle fattening facility with a spray race. The first crop (7000 tomato plants and 10 000 cabbages) was planted using seed that was provided by ARDA as a starter pack.

Farmers were contributing US\$1 per farmer per month towards a revolving fund, which was expected to finance their input requirements in the long run. The VBU was making plans to employ two guards to look after the infrastructure, crops and fish as well as a VBU coordinator from the community.

The second site visited was Gwebu Primary School

Unit in Buhera, Manicaland.

It was set up by ARDA and ZINWA which also provided the borehole and all its fittings, cabbage seedlings, butternut and maize seed. The model was student based with students in Grade 3 to 7 going to the VBU to carry out Agriculture lessons and work on the garden for 1 hour.

The school was working with AMA to source markets for its products. At the time of the visit, the VBU sold its crop to teachers, the school feeding programme and the local market. The VBU was overseen by a committee made up of school teachers, and SDC members who oversaw its operations

The third site, Jinjika VBU in Mangwe district was established in August 2023 with assistance from ZINWA, ARDA, Forestry Commission, ZIMTRADE and the Department of Irrigation, the intervention included the drilling of a borehole, installation of solar and water tanks, establishment of two fish ponds. The VBU received tomato and rape seedlings from ARDA



SACP team members at a fish pond in Jinjika VBU, Mangwe district

LESSONS LEARNT

The project identified the following lessons that will assist in increasing production, efficiency and sustainability within the village business units;

- For the purposes of sustainability, there is need to refine the beneficiary selection and to strike a balance between the area under cultivation and the number of farmers
- There is need for a sustainability model in terms of both the inputs for cropping as well as continued infrastructure maintenance.
- There is need to pay particular attention to adequacy of water source for gardens as well as quality of water infrastructure to ensure the gardens have enough water for cropping, livestock and portable drinking water.
- It is important to have training of farmers in product marketing and market linkages so that they produce crops required by the market
- Issues of security need to be infused into the project at inception.
- The VBU can also support other income generating activities besides the crops, for example, cattle fattening and dipping.
- There is need to further explore the labour component within the School Business Units, to ensure that there is adequate labour
- There is need to train school committees on marketing dynamics before crop cultivation to reduce over-reliance on AMA
- There is possibility of clustering many VBUs in an area and linking them to an off-taker instead of them viewing each other as competition.
- The SBU remains critical in ensuring adequate nutrition for the students, offering a practical site

for lessons and has potential to earn income for schools

- There is need to set up an Operations and Maintenance Fund in the gardens at inception in order to ensure sustainability of the VBU infrastructure
- Environmental considerations are important in order to ensure that gardens are not located in wetlands, which make them susceptible to water logging.

Jabatshaba VBU hosts 7 VBUs for exchange visit

The Smallholder Agriculture Cluster Project (SACP) hosted an exchange visit for farmers from 7 village business units in Lupane district. 28 farmers and seven extension officers Village Business Units that included Jabatshaba, Mabhikwa, Ngcono, Sikhwehle, Phakamani Mazwideni, Thuthukani Mazwideni and Zhani Mubone Bhani attended the event at Jabatshaba Village Business Unit. The event was also attended by community members, government ministries and agencies and an Agricultural Producer Group also participated. The APG funded its own travel so that it could also benefit from the exchange visit.

The visit began with a tour of the 1.25 hectare village business unit where 1 hectare was under tomatoes, cabbage, carrots and rape. The VBU was at the end of its first cycle of crop. The farmers assisted by the Extension officer explained the agronomic issues that included the establishment of the nursery for

cabbage, tomatoes, carrots and leafy green vegetables, their transplanting and integrated pest control. Farmers were keen to understand the pest control regime for both cabbage and tomatoes.

Also of interest to most farmers was the Fabiola cabbage variety and the Candella tomato variety grown in the VBU. The tomato variety was high yielding and had enabled farmers to continue harvesting its fruits for about four out of a possible 6 months. The farmers were also interested in understanding the reason for the cracking of the Fabiola Cabbage variety that was in the VBU. The extension officer Caroline Lupahala explained that the variety needed to be harvested early and that farmers needed to ensure the availability of a market for all their crops before going into production.'



Jabatshaba VBU Chairperson- Lucy Moyo (in pink skirt and green T-shirt) takes visiting farmers and extension officers on a tour of the Jabula Village Business Unit

The Village Business unit has already identified markets which included nearby boarding schools that include Fatima and Mabhikwa High Schools. The VBU indicated that it was going to grow a second cycle of the Fabiola Variety as well as another variety, Majesty. One of the issues discussed included



Extension officer, Caroline Lupahala explains the how the Candella tomato variety is grown in Lupane

water and environmental conservation. The farmers have a water point committee which also includes members from the VBU and participants from the community that benefits through access to water. All beneficiaries pay US\$1 with farmers that have benefitted from the garden paying US\$2 each. This

money is going towards a fund that will be used to maintain the garden and replace any broken or damaged infrastructure.



Farmers show off matured carrots from Jabatshaba VBU in Lupane

In terms of environmental conservation, farmers have done stone pitching and constructed a contour that is meant to slow down water and prevent soil erosion. The project also took advantage of the event which was combined with belated World Environment Day as the project encourages farmers to plant trees for fruits as well as environmental conservation. One of the project partners, Forestry Commission also made a presentation on the importance of planting trees for afforestation and nutrition. The Commission also went on to demonstrate the process of tree planting to farmers. Farmers from all the VBUs received 10 fruit trees for transplanting in their VBUs.



Above- Taking notes... Farmers from one of the VBUs take notes during the exchange visit

Farmers indicated that they had drawn the following lessons from the exchange programme;

- The importance of ensuring available markets for all products
- Importance of sound agronomic practices in crop management
- The importance of integrated pest management
- Importance of mulching as a water conservation technique

SACP supports successful tomato demo plot in Mutoko



Mr Muchena in his plot in February 2025

My name is Garikai Muchena from Chitora 1 Irrigation Scheme in Mutoko. I hosted a demonstration plot for tomatoes in collaboration with the Smallholder Agriculture Cluster Project (SACP). This year I had the Cadella tomato variety. Last year, we tried the Trinity variety, which performed extremely well. After the crop matured, we hosted a field day to show case the crop. There was also the added advantage stemming from the availability of a ready off taker, Choppies Supermarket who collected the crop from the irrigation scheme.



From the Trinity demo that I hosted last year I planted 6000 plants and harvested 108 crates, weighing 40kgs per crate (7240kg). I sold my tomatoes for US\$0.40 per kg. I managed to make an income of US\$5000 and from the proceeds of last year's crop, I bought a water pump and inputs for this year (2025) which included 6 000 seeds and fertilisers.

From the experience last year, with Trinity, the variety became very popular in the area and has become a variety of choice among many farmers in the scheme.

I noticed the following advantages of cultivating the Trinity variety;

- It can be grown throughout the year
- It can be grown in both the field and greenhouses
- It is resistant to nematodes
- It is high yielding and allows the farmer to harvest tomatoes for six months with consistency of yield and fruits size
-

As you can see, we are doing farming as a business in the irrigation scheme. From the same of the variety that I grew last year, I managed to send children to school.

From the variety grown this year, I managed to harvest 6 384kgs from a 0.1 hectare plot which gave a total income of US\$2539. After deducting expenses I was left with a total income of US\$1 505. I used US\$300 to pay school fees for my child and also managed to buy a set of sofas for US\$300. I also managed to buy clothing for my family, food and inputs for the next crop.



Jabatshaba extension officer shines in National Extension officer competitions



©InfoMinZV

Caroline Luphahla, the AGRITEX extension officer for Jabatshaba Village Business Unit in Lupane, receives her prize from His Excellency, the Presidents of South Africa, Cyril Ramaphosa at the 2025 Zimbabwe Agricultural Show in Harare - Photo courtesy of the Ministry of Information, Publicity and Broadcasting Services

Jabatshaba VBU extension officer, Caroline Luphahla outshone other extension officers in the country to scoop the National Best Extension prize at the recently held Zimbabwe Agricultural Show in Harare. Luphahla said she won the prize based on the work she did which project supervision within the wards, which included record keeping, relationships and partnerships, master farmer training for farmers as well as advanced management.

Jabatshaba Village Business Unit, established under the Smallholder Agriculture Cluster Project has become a centre of excellence in the district, hosting other units for learning purposes. The VBU, established in 2024, had realized an income of US\$6 431.00 after the first crop cycle. The farmers grew tomatoes, cabbage and had also established a nutrition corner where they planted vegetables such as carrots and leafy green vegetables for nutrition.



Luphahla, third from left, during a learning event hosted by Jabatshaba for seven other VBUs

Growing sorghum in Hwange – The story of Nambikwa Ncube

Nambikwa Ncube of Jambezi in Hwange, hosted a sorghum demonstration plot in his field. He is part of the Siyaphambili APG and this was his first demo plot with SACP. The sorghum variety was SV4 and the farmer had two *Intwasa* plots, one with mulch and another without mulch. The farmer received inputs from SACP and these included seed, fertilisers, pesticide and lime from SACP.

Land preparation was done in August and planting took place on the 18th of December 2024. The farmer applied organic manure and Compound D during land preparation. Six plants were planted in one hole and germination took place between the 21st and 22nd of December. Thinning out and gap filling was carried out on 30 December 2024. The crop was attacked by the fall army worm on 27 December and the farmers sprayed the crop using a pesticide called

Demise. The farmer then applied AN fertiliser at a rate of 7,5kg per hectare.

Despite the prolonged dry spell experienced in the area, the farmer harvested 0,3 tonnes from the 0.062 hectare plot which would translate to a 2,5 tonnes per hectare. The crop was affected by a prolonged dry spell during grain filling stage which reduced the expected yield.



Mr Nambikwa Ncube of Jambezi in his sorghum demo plot in February 2025



Observations made by the farmer

- The stem from the demo plot with mulch was bigger than other crops planted using other farming methods.
- The farmer used less labour in the plot
- Farmers must have enough inputs by the time of planting
- The use of pesticides is important in order to safeguard the crop from pests which can lead to

- deteriorating crop conditions
- It's important to have adequate stocks of pesticide for the crop
- Conservation farming methods which include mulching are important in retaining moisture in arid areas such as Hwange

