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Technical Brief: Gender Equality Programming in Food and Nutrition Security



Couple working on their plot in a Takunda established solar powered garden in Mutare district: Photo credit: Kumbirai Gwamanda

ABOUT TAKUNDA

The Takunda activity is funded by **The United States Agency for International Development (USAID)** and executed by **CARE Zimbabwe** in collaboration with six partners, operates in the drought-prone areas of **Buhera, Mutare, Zaka, and Chivi districts of Zimbabwe**. The aim of the project is to increase sustainable, equitable and resilient food, nutrition and income security for vulnerable households and communities in Manicaland and Masvingo Provinces.

IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS



Takunda directly responds to the underlying causes of food insecurity and malnutrition, with activities under three purpose areas seeking to increase incomes from on-farm, off-farm, and non-farm livelihoods activities (Purpose 1); improve the nutritional status of children under five years of age, adolescent girls, and women of reproductive age (Purpose 2); and build institutional and local capacities among ultra-poor and chronically vulnerable households to cope with shocks and stressors and reduce risk (Purpose 3). Across all purpose areas, gender equality is a major cross-cutting theme that aims to re-envision harmful socio-cultural norms that perpetuates food and nutrition insecurity.

USAID TAKUNDA

Where: Manicaland Province and Masvingo Province (Zaka and Chivi districts)

When: 2020-2027

Donors: USAID Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance

Partners: FHI 360, International Youth Foundation, Nutrition Action Zimbabwe, Bulawayo Project Centre, Environment Africa, ICRISAT

Reach: 301,636 individuals across 92 communities in Buhera, Mutare, Chivi and Zaka districts targeting 114,000

GENDER EQUALITY CONTEXT AND THE CHALLENGE TAKUNDA IS TRYING TO ADDRESS

Gender and generational inequalities among women and men, boys and girls are rooted in patriarchal, cultural, and religious values, beliefs, and practices. They manifest throughout all spheres of life, including in intra-household decision-making; access to and control over household and community assets; gender roles and responsibilities; participation in public decision-making; Gender-Based Violence (GBV); and access to and utilization of services. Takunda's Gender Analysis study, including results from the follow-on Gender Outcome Mapping Baseline Study, revealed the following:

Gendered Division of Labor: Women are involved in daily routine work relating to domestic roles and household chores, while men mostly engage in productive activities that generate income.¹ Men's involvement in family care activities only increased with the use of technology, where they may have to use the wheelbarrow or scotch cart when fetching water and firewood². In some areas, men who engaged in family and childcare activities suffered from stigma and discrimination and were labeled as weak.³

Gender-Based Violence including Child Marriage: Statistics show that within urban areas, 2.1 percent of women and girls were married before the age of 15, and 21.3 percent were married before the age of 18. In rural areas, 6.4 percent were married before age 15 and 40 percent before age 18.⁴ Thus, more women in rural settings experience early marriage than their urban counterparts.

Access to and Control over Resources and Assets: About 65 percent of households in Zimbabwe are headed by males and 35 percent by females⁵. Most women (about 86 percent) depend on land for their livelihood and food production for their families.⁶ However, they are faced with a myriad of challenges, including persistent droughts, limited start-up capital, and restricted access to and control of land for production and productivity. The other constraints include a lack of access to markets, lack of competitiveness, limited extension services, and poor access to finance and input.

¹ USAID Takunda Gender Analysis 2020

² Ibid

³ Ibid

⁴ <https://www.unicef.org/zimbabwe/end-child-marriage-empower-women>

⁵ USAID Takunda Gender Analysis

⁶ USAID Takunda Gender Analysis

Access to public spaces and services: Mobility constraints and gender roles and responsibilities for women continue to limit their participation in profitable markets across Takunda districts. Women experience challenges accessing transportation and this is associated with costs of taking their grain to the nearest depots. At times, it takes several days for the selling process to be complete, and women with young children find it difficult to be away from their children for days at a time. This forces women to resort to local markets where prices are less competitive.

Social Analysis and Action in Takunda:

Social Analysis and Action is a model through which individuals and communities explore and re-envision social norms, beliefs, and practices that impact food, nutrition security, and resilience.

Household Decision Making: The Takunda Gender Analysis findings indicate that patterns of decision-making in the home differed between women, men, boys, and girls. Husbands' decisions regarding high-value assets and large livestock often prevail over those of the wife. Women in polygamous families from apostolic and non-apostolic sects have flexibility to make decisions on land use, livelihoods, and income-generating activities (IGAs) compared to those in monogamous marriages⁷. Young people across districts felt systematically excluded and marginalized from participating in household decision-making by the older generation because they lacked resources, citing unemployment and limited opportunities to engage in meaningful economic activities as primary reasons for their limited resources⁸.

IMPLEMENTATION MECHANISM/APPROACH

Takunda aims to address and re-envision restrictive gender and social norms through a process of community dialogue and action using the Social Analysis and Action (SAA) process and tools. Takunda's gender approach layers SAA into various program interventions including Farmer Field and Business School; Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLA); the nutrition care group approach and disaster risk reduction platforms. The SAA process is implemented in five-step cycles:

Step 1. Staff Reflections: This is the foundational step of SAA that encourages ongoing critical reflection with the program team on gender, social, and power norms. The aim is that staff members increase their own understanding, and comfort with the topics, and their skills for facilitating dialogues on gender. Takunda has conducted staff training on SAA, Reflections of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion, and Preventing Sexual Harassment, Exploitation, and Abuse, which are increasingly positively impacting staff's personal gender equality journey. These sessions have resulted in staff making personal commitments on gender and equity in the workplace and their personal lives. *"I am making a commitment to tolerate and embrace differences in opinion and actions that I may come across in the execution of my duties. Going forward this knowledge will help me strike a balance and always engage my fellow colleagues,"* remarks by CARE Takunda staff after training.

Step 2. Community Reflection: Facilitated by a member of the community, this second step is a continuous process of exploring the underlying causes of gendered social norms and how they affect food, nutrition security, and resilience. These sessions also provide communities with the opportunity to challenge the discriminatory gender social norms they identify in their respective lives. Takunda leads gender dialogue sessions with VSLA groups, supporting women leadership skills and financial decision-making. Takunda engages producer farmers to re-envision gender norms, including those related to mobility challenges for women in accessing markets and increased labor burden resulting from engagements in agricultural activities.

⁷ USAID Takunda Gender Analysis 2020

⁸ USAID Takunda Gender Analysis 2020

Step 3. Planning for Action: This third step is vital for turning motivation for change into eventual and collective action for sustainable transformation, centering around community's own identification and prioritization of practical actions to re-envision gender social norms.

Step 4. Implementing Plans: The fourth step is to implement plans where gender and power inequities are challenged through increased community activism to adopt and maintain positive changes.

Step 5. Evaluation: These processes conclude with an opportunity for monitoring, evaluation, and learning. Using gender dialogue monitoring tools, Takunda conducts routine monitoring for gender monitoring and evaluation. The accomplishments detailed below are documented through Takunda monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.



*Elderly women conducting a SAA dialogue-Zaka District.
Photo credit: Chisi Mutendadzamera*

ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND EVIDENCE OF IMPACT

Takunda has recorded impact on household food security, nutrition and resilience and this is attributed to gender equality interventions implemented across the program components. Notable changes include women taking up leadership positions and influencing decisions in food security structures; women purchasing and having control over assets and resources; reduced incidences of GBV; and increased role sharing that resulted in increased production.

Key Results

- Short-term skills training in hairdressing, sewing, detergent making, and baking enabled young women to increase their average monthly household incomes from \$34.55 in 2022 and \$77.49 in 2023 to \$150.00 in FY24, enhancing their economic participation and access to resources.
- Participation in VSLAs and life skills training empowered 4,745 youths (1,042 men, 3,703 women) to challenge patriarchal norms and reduce GBV and child marriage cases in their communities.
- Percentage of women with access to and control over productive assets and resources, including land, increased from 56% and 43% by women and youth in FY23 to 96% and 89% in FY24, respectively (PaBs 2024).
- Leadership among adult and young women increased from 50% in 2023 (Outcome Mapping Baseline) to 90.9% in 2024 (PaBs).
- Women received 85.7% of the \$270,321.00 VSLA funds that were in circulation throughout FY23, increasing opportunities for them to start IGAs.
- Improved minimum meal frequency among children aged 6 to 23 months at 60%, against a target of 38%, and improved household dietary diversity at 74%, against a target of 65% (PaBS 2024).



Jennifer and husband on their tomato plot:
Photo credit: Kumbirai Gwamanda

George Ndapfinya (47), a Garden Chairperson, and his wife, Jennifer Madondo (44), a Business Development Facilitator (BDF), have gone through significant transformation since Takunda's interventions. George used to spend most of his time with friends in the community. After engaging in SAA dialogues, he now works alongside his wife, making collective decisions and practicing gendered division of labor. He assists with fetching manure for the garden and supports Jennifer to engage in other economic initiatives, like bee keeping. "Nowadays my husband is very supportive compared to the past. He helps me with most gardening activities which we got from Takunda," Jennifer shares. While George tends to the garden, Jennifer cooks, washes, and takes care of children. George is now

transparent with his finances, and he declares his earnings from selling vegetables, which has enhanced their joint decision making on household income. George has also shared his farming expertise on improved farming methods and pest control to community garden members, working closely with Agritex extension worker. While George has made progress on certain behaviors, he still struggles to contribute to household chores like washing and cooking for the children. He feels with further engagement and seeing other men performing chores, one day he will also do it.

Kingsley Chingozo (57) and his wife, Winnmore Muchapireyi, Gender Champion (52), have made significant strides in their relationship since participating in Takunda-facilitated gender dialogues. According to Kingsley, he is now actively involved in household chores, including washing, cooking, and ironing. Furthermore, they even registered their cattle in both their names. Kingsley expressed his delight in having his wife always by his side, and it has helped them achieve household food, nutrition, and income security. He proudly announced that the community mostly addresses his homestead as 'Pamai Chingozo - Mrs. Chingozo's homestead'. Winnmore confirmed Kingsley's support and confessed that in the past, they used to quarrel. With the introduction of gender dialogues, a lot has since changed between them. They now plan together and live peacefully as husband and wife.



Kingsley and Winnmore in their granary:
Photo credit: Sipiwe Maphosa

As part of his transformative journey, Kingsley acknowledged the conflicts that often arise upon death of the breadwinner, where relatives demand assets at the expense of the widow and children, and he strongly

opposes the practice. Kingsley still struggles with sweeping and acknowledges that gender socialization is an ongoing process, saying *"I understand that gender socialization is a big issue, and although our community is changing, there are still deeply ingrained social norms that hold people back. We grew up with assigned gender roles, and shifting these beliefs takes time."*

Challenging Discriminatory Religious Practices (Apostolic Sect)

Nina's (pseudo name), story started with her and the other apostolic women secretly accessing health and nutrition services without their husbands' knowledge. She felt compelled to do something as an affected 42-year-old third wife with four girls and married to Nelson (pseudo-name), a 51-year-old apostolic polygamist. Nina wanted to capitalize on the Takunda Care Group training opportunity to develop her capacities around health and nutrition education. She initially faced resistance from her husband, who was against her participation, citing their church's values that prohibit women from leading and speaking in public. In addition, the church doctrine does not allow them to access health services. Through continuous engagement, Nina's husband understood the importance of her role and saw the need and reason to support her. Nelson eventually gave Nina his permission to participate. Takunda trained her to become a lead mother and gender champion. Today, she is an empowered apostolic woman, able to participate in public and access services. She also brought change to the apostolic community, which sees a significant number of women and men taking part in Takunda health and nutrition interventions. While she still accesses some services like family planning secretly, her husband no longer has issues with her leading Care Groups or being a gender champion.

LESSONS LEARNED:

- Raising gender awareness and building capacity on gender equality for Takunda staff helps to lead to more systematic, effective gender integration and community engagements. Staff members, through ongoing staff capacity-building sessions, become more credible facilitators when leading sessions with community groups and by critically reflecting on their own personal biases they are better able to understand the complexities of the change process.
- Takunda has integrated sustainability strategies in gender equality approaches implementation, and this has resulted in increased ownership of the activities and results. Gender Champions were selected from the community, trained in leading gender activities, and are motivated to carry on the work. Takunda has linked the Gender Champions to existing government structures including the Ministry of Gender for continued support and provision of resources and some have been certified thereby receiving recognition from groups, community leaders, and stakeholders.
- While progress is noted among men and women on practicing promoted behaviors, change is not uniform across individuals. There are early and late adopters, and this warrants the program to continue with gender dialogues, leveraging the Local Service Provider⁹ initiative which is more sustainable.

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⁹ The Local Service Provider model involves the identification, training, coaching, and mentoring of community-based individuals to ensure the continuous provision of services including facilitating gender dialogues to participants or farmers. This approach aims to sustain the positive outcomes observed due to project implementation.