



# Talents of Hope

## Empowering communities in Zimbabwe through training and support

Baptist Union of Wales Appeal 2023-24

### Background

The Republic of Zimbabwe is a country located in Southern Africa with a population of around 15 million. It became independent when the white minority government of Ian Smith declared independence from the UK in 1965. However, the black majority population continued to be oppressed until 1980 when the first elections which were open to all races were held.

The President of Zimbabwe between 1987 and 2017 was Robert Mugabe. In this period the state's security forces dominated the country, with human rights violations being common.

The economy also suffered, with periods of low or contracting growth, hyperinflation and high unemployment. Following the formation of a unity government in 2008, the economy has gradually strengthened but Zimbabwe continues to be one of the poorest countries in the world.

### Christian Aid's work in Zimbabwe

Christian Aid has been working in Zimbabwe since the 1980s, mostly focussing its efforts in six provinces, including Mashonaland East.



Working with and through local partners, the charity places a lot of emphasis on building the resilience of local people in the face of climate change affected by erratic weather patterns.

Empowering women is a key aspect of this work as is helping poorer communities access markets in a fair way.

The BRACT project is an example of how this work makes a positive change in people's lives on the ground.

BRACT (Building Resilience through improving the Absorptive and Adaptive Capacity for Transformation of at-risk communities) works in the Mutoko and Mudzi Districts of Mashonaland and Christian Aid is the lead partner in the work. Through training in different farming methods, it has helped families become more resilient in the face of weather shocks, as well as helping them diversify their income streams, thus making them less reliant on agriculture which can be so ravaged by extreme weather.



**The following three stories are examples of how people's lives have been transformed through the BRACT project.**



### **Taindonzwa Kapfudzaruwa**

Taindonzwa Kapfudzaruwa is a grandmother of seven who lives in the Mudzi District. As well as caring for the grandchildren since their parents are working away in Zimbabwe's capital city of Harare and in South Africa, Taindonzwa also cares for her disabled husband and manages the family farm.

Looking back at how difficult it was to farm, Taindonzwa laments: **'No matter how hard we worked we could not improve production and some years the poor rains meant that we harvested nothing.'** She recognises that the weather patterns that had changed due to the climate crisis had made growing food such a challenge for her. However, working with the BRACK project has transformed her life.

Despite referring to herself as elderly, Taindonzwa was keen to receive training on new methods of farming from BRACK. **'Although I have been a farmer since 1978, I didn't know much about new ways to grow crops and keep livestock. I have always wanted to learn more about farming because it is my passion,'** she explains.

In the training, she learned how to grow different crops and also how to use different growing methods, such as conservation farming, using organic methods and how to control pests. One particular crop she was taught about was the indigenous Kalahari melon which is very drought resistant, a key characteristic in such a dry region. Previously, the melon was mainly used to feed cattle but now she has learned that the seeds can be sold to make cosmetic cream. **'It's actually a valuable crop and yet it grows very easily in our area,'** explains Taindonzwa.

This crop has added a vital income stream to the family's finances and they use it to buy roof sheets for her house and to build a better chicken house.

Taindonzwa has only praise for the BRACK project: **'The project has made a big impact in the community especially on those who are keen to learn new things. We got so much useful training and I wish that I could have attended more. I have been able to change the way I farm, even at my age. This knowledge will be passed on to others and that means that the whole community will continue to improve and one day hunger will be a thing of the past.'**





### **Blessings Muzori**

When the unpredictable climate made farming a struggle, Blessings Muzori and her family found life difficult. In order to survive, her husband had to move to the city to find work. **'Things were hard,'** remembers Blessings. **'We were living hand-to mouth and had to wait for provisions to be sent from my husband.'**

Having to run the farm on her own added to her pressures as harvesting became ever more difficult. And even when she did manage to grow crops, getting decent prices at market proved difficult as well. **'We were at the point when we almost had to go out and beg for food from our neighbours,'** Blessings added.

A further pressure was that her marriage was under strain with her husband living away from his family. **'Things were very difficult and painful, we didn't have a good life,'** she laments.

The BRACT project, however, gave Blessings the tools with which to transform her life. A key aspect of this transformation has been the setting up of a local savings and lending group – an ISAL – whereby local people come together to save on a regular basis and then lend out funds at interest to members of the group. Since this is a local project run by the members themselves, all the interest and profits gained stay in the locality.

Blessings' ISAL group asked BRACT for help to buy an oil press machine for sunflower, soya and peanut oil. The ISAL group paid 30% of the cost with the savings they had collected themselves, with BRACT contributing 70%. The new business has been a great success, with the group able to sell various products in the local market.

Blessings speaks highly of her ISAL: **'We discuss what projects to invest in and work together to achieve our group goals. The ISAL concept has helped us buy items and build things at our homes. We did not actually know each other before the project but since we formed the group, we have become best friends.'**

Blessings has also been trained in different farming techniques by BRACT. Unbeknown to her, the community had valuable resources growing wild in the area. Wild fruits and other products were available to collect and sell. For example, the resurrection bush – a very drought resistant plant – and zumbani which can be used to create herbal teas. Both plants fetch high prices from buyers who have been linked to Blessings' community by BRACT.

**'BRACT has transformed me,'** says Blessings. She has been chosen to be a lead farmer in her community, which means she helps train others in the various farming techniques. Her husband has also returned home and with her new found success, life is so much better.



## Netsai Kateera

Before hearing about the BRACK project, Netsai Kateera – a mother of three from Nhire village, Mutoko – was finding making a living from the land extremely difficult. The family would often find paying school fees for the children a struggle and at times things were even worse. **‘Sometimes we could not even feed the children or meet our day-to-day requirements,’** says Netsai.



The family were farming and making bricks but because of unpredictable rains and a poor market for the bricks, life was extremely tough. BRACK, however, gave them hope for a better life.

While BRACK has trained Netsai in different farming techniques, giving her the tools needed to farm in a tough climate, she has also chosen to make a big change in her life. She realised that one of her community's needs was for metal workers, so Netsai decided to train as a welder. Though welding is traditionally seen as a man's occupation, eight other women joined the three month course with Netsai. **‘I believe in equal delegation of duties for men and women and my husband is in full support of my choice of occupation,’** she explains.

Following the course, Netsai teamed up with other graduates to set up their own welding business – Star Welding. They rent premises locally and manufacture a range of agricultural tools, along with window and door frames and other products.

**‘My favourite activity is making hoes. I enjoy all of the stages and I like the fact that I am making something that everyone in the community needs and wants to use because we are all farmers,’** laughs Netsai.

Training in climate smart agriculture has also been provided by BRACK. A particular new technique Netsai has learned is making bush meal and hay for her livestock from local material. **‘We have noticed a big improvement in the health of our cattle since we started feeding it to them,’** she explains.

She has also learned the importance of diversifying crops. **‘Planting different crops means we get plenty of food and if one crop can't tolerate the drought or gets hit by pests and diseases, there are still plenty of others for us to eat and sell,’** Netsai explains.



Key to BRACK's success in building resilience among the farmers of northern Zimbabwe is the training they give to those farmers. Through that training, they are then able to strengthen their own situation and lift themselves out of poverty, giving them hope for the future.

Through the Talents of Hope appeal, Baptists in Wales will be able to partner with Christian Aid and its local partners in Zimbabwe, standing in unity with them as they continue to find ways to thrive in a harsh climate.

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