

## **Dependency Syndrome by Communities or Insufficient Ingestion Period by Benefactor Organizations? The Chirumanzu Caritas Community Gardening Project Experience in Zimbabwe**

**Mark Matsa<sup>1</sup> and Beauty Dzawanda<sup>1</sup>**

### **Abstract**

---

Community gardens have helped to fight poverty in Zimbabwe's vulnerable rural communities in the face of climate change. However, these gardens normally collapse soon after the donor leaves raising questions about borrowed climate change initiatives and their capacity for sustainability and resilience among communities. The study assessed the performance of Caritas initiated and sponsored community gardens in Chaka ward, Chirumanzu District, during and after the sponsors' regime. Data was collected using questionnaires, interviews, and direct observations. Analysis was done using descriptive statistics and content analysis. Results show that the gardens flourished during Caritas reign but quickly shrank and even folded after the NGO's departure. The research recommends that project initiators should stay a while longer than they are currently doing. Rural District Councils should create a community projects department to take over assistance to community projects after the sponsor has left. A nominal fee should also be paid by beneficiaries while the project is running under the initial sponsor and even after. This will enable continuity and enhance sustainability even after the project decommissioning stage.

---

**Keyword:** Community gardens, Chirumanzu, Climate change, Sustainability, Dependency syndrome

### **Background to Study**

Community gardens are found in regions of most countries worldwide. According to Middleton (2009), community gardens are a place to grow food crops, flowers and herbs in the company of friends and neighbours. Their very persistence is proof of their intrinsic economic and nutritional merit.

---

<sup>1</sup> Department of Geography and Environmental Studies, Gweru, Zimbabwe.  
Email: [matsam@msu.ac.zw](mailto:matsam@msu.ac.zw) or [markmatsa3@gmail.com](mailto:markmatsa3@gmail.com)

Moreover, in terms of alleviating food insecurity, food production controlled by households is more reliable and sustainable than nutrition interventions that rely on government goodwill and financial support (Local harvest 2009). Community gardening can be a sustainable strategy for improving food security and incomes when gardens are well adapted to local agronomic and resource conditions, cultural traditions and preference (Chambers and Conway 1991).

The historical phenomenon of community garden projects has traditionally been initiated due to a local or global economic crisis (Grigg 1974). Traditionally community gardening had been supported and often initiated by the state; once the particular crisis had been alleviated, the projects were abandoned. Even today, community gardens are fundamentally a response to a crisis, although what distinguishes the modern reliance of such ventures from the traditional forms is that, these projects are initiated and supported by grassroots activists, by communities, and neighbourhoods and have evolved into a cohesive social movement (Grigg 1974). Thus, the modern use of community gardens is a new social movement seeking social justice and creating alternatives to an economic system that increasingly marginalizes and impoverishes larger segments of the world's population (Ellis 1998).

The earliest documented cases of community gardening occurred in Detroit, New York, and Philadelphia in the United States of America, to address unemployment, poverty, and hunger during an economic crisis in the late 1880's (Middleton 2009). According to Middleton (2009), during the Great Depression, the city of Detroit launched the 'Detroit Thrift Gardens Program' as an "organized urban gardening program to assist the poor and unemployed in meeting their nutrition needs" which also "encouraged participants to grow produce for home consumption".

Community gardening in its modern-day form represents a multifaceted approach to individual communities seeking alternatives to and alleviation of the increased marginalization of working people into the ranks of the poor and to deal directly with issues of food security and autonomy (Middleton 2009). Community gardens act as a survival strategy for the poor in many communities to share resources together in order to meet their daily basic needs and mutual obligations (Scoones 2010). Community gardens provide inexpensive water filtration environments and control storm-water runoff by using rainwater as a resource for growing food; gardens absorb approximately 15% more rainwater than lawns or vacant land (Cohon 2011).

In Africa, the utilization of the concept and practice of community gardening has been based on a response to an economic crisis and social movement caused by Climate change (Matsa, 2013). Africa is considered very vulnerable to climate change because of widespread poverty (Eriksen *et al.*, 2008). Climate change compounded the existing poverty through reduced food availability, increased water scarcity, financial insecurity, and incidence of illness thereby contributing to this economic crisis that initiated the use of community gardens to curb food insecurity in Zimbabwe (New Farmer 2004). Hence the goal of community gardens was to increase household and intra household food security throughout the year.

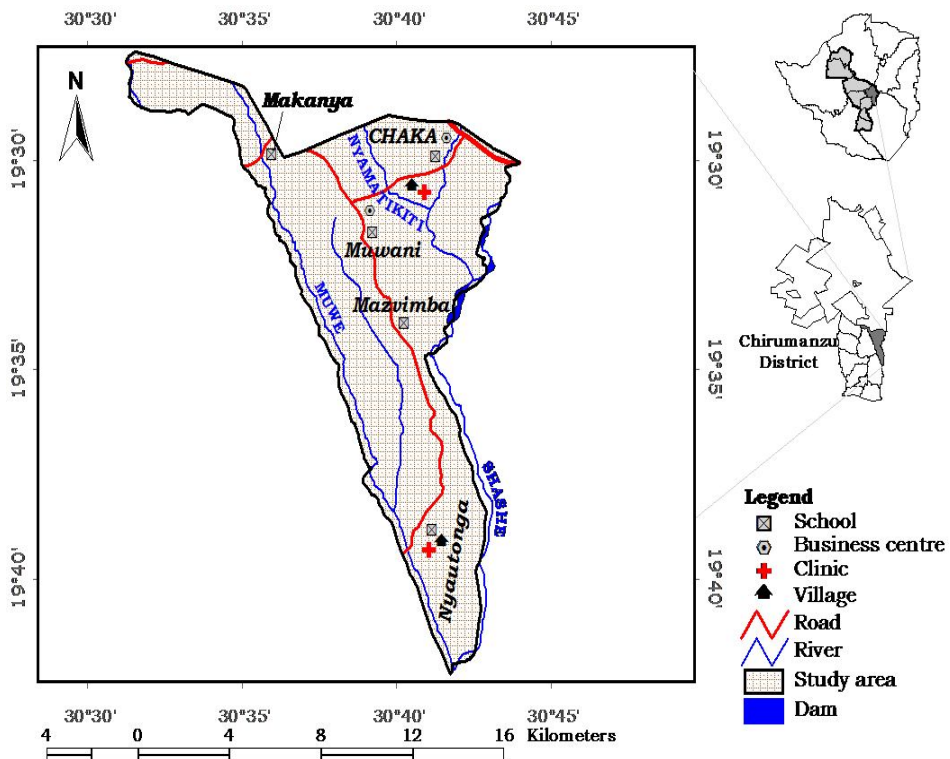
Auret (1990) argues that in Zimbabwe community gardens were set up by government in the 1990s after research showed that families were failing to keep pace with the rising cost of fresh food. Recently mass establishment of community gardens was done by Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) namely Action Faim and CARE Zimbabwe in a bid to maintain sustainable livelihoods among the urban and rural poor households (Moyo and Tevera 2000). In Chirumanzu Caritas Zimbabwe established community gardens in 2007 with the aim of improving the food security of the vulnerable members of the community (Caritas Operating Manual, 2012).

In the study of the contribution of community gardens to alleviating food insecurity for 53 community gardeners in Maphephetheni, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, using the Household Food Insecurity Access Scale, it was found that 89% of these households were anxious about food supplies, consumed insufficient food and were severely food insecure (Middleton 2009).

Since these community gardens at first are under the ownership of NGOs and then handed over to the local community at a later stage, the question is raised whether the assistance of NGOs is a panacea to community development or not. This study thus seeks to assess the impact of community gardens to household food security prior to and after their change in ownership from Caritas to the local community in Chaka ward 2, Chirumanzu district.

In Chirumanzu district community gardens were introduced by Caritas since 2007 to augment food security among the poor households. Caritas assisted garden beneficiaries through the provision of vegetable seeds, herb seedlings, wire fencing, garden tools, water storage and conveyance together with training on aspects such as, composting, mulching, water harvesting, crop rotations, pest management, seed retention and marketing of produce among others. However Caritas only offered its assistance for one year since their establishment before handing over ownership of the community gardens to the local community. Mixed feelings pertaining to this issue have arisen with some beneficiaries subscribing to this change whilst others view it as being neglected since some do not afford the purchase of seeds to effectively perpetuate the existence of the project. This study seeks to examine the impact of community gardens on household food security during ownership by Caritas and after their handover to the local community of Chaka Ward 2, as well as determining whether NGOs are a panacea to community development or not.

**Map and Description of Study Area**



**Fig 1 Map of Chaka Ward 2, Chirumanzu District**

Chaka ward is situated in Chirumanzu district, which is in Masvingo Province. This ward is communal and has a population of 6 127 people (Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency 2012). The Ward has five primary schools namely Chaka, Makanya, Mazvimba, Muwani and Nyamandi; one secondary school, Gonawapotera and one health facility, Chaka rural health facility. There is an extremely high episode of periods with extreme drought, flooding risk is low. Chaka has a humid climate with a subtropical dry forest bio-zone and it lies in agro-ecological region 3 (Caritas (2012).September is on average the month with most sunshine. Temperatures range from plus/minus 15degrees Celsius in winter to plus/minus 30degrees Celsius in summer and annual mean rainfall ranges from 450mm to 700mm(Feresu, 2012).Rainfall and other forms of precipitation have no distinct peak month. Granite rock is the most common rock in Chaka.

The soil in the area is high in lixisols, soil with clay-enriched lower horizon and high saturation bases. Rivers found in this ward are Nyamatikiti and Shashe, with Manhowo and Mazvimba dams built along them(Caritas 2012). The landscape is covered with mosaic vegetation and croplands. The most common tree species are *Brachystegia boehmii* (mupfuti), *Colospermum mopane* (Mopani), *Julbernardia Globiflora* (mutondo) and Musasa tree.

Livelihoods in this area are primarily agricultural but due to the drier climate, crop production alone is an unreliable food and income source (Livelihood Profile,2010). For better-off households, animal husbandry and crop production sales, mainly groundnuts and cereals in good years, makes up the main economic activity while vegetable sales, and casual labour make up the main economic activities for poor households. Beer brewing also contributes some income across households. Generally the area is food deficit with food surplus usually once in every 5years.

## **Research Methods**

### Target Population

The targeted population included the 120 households in selected community gardens of Chaka Ward 2 of Chirumanzu Rural District and the key informants from relevant stakeholders in the area namely; Rural District Council, Caritas, and Agricultural Technical Extension (AGRITEX).

Households were targeted since they constitute the number of beneficiaries who are directly involved in community gardening. They were also the ones who knew about the types of crops they produce, their intended uses and benefits, including the challenges they are facing in the management of community gardens. Households provided information on the various forms of assistance they were getting from Caritas in promoting community gardens or increasing output per hectare.

The Chief Executive Officer Rural District Council is the entry point of all developmental issues in the district hence he also was part of the targeted population.

This was so because Chirumanzu RDC takes part in supporting community gardens in collaboration with Non-Governmental Organizations and AGRITEX through participating in workshops and other activities which support community gardening, especially training of farmers, provision of seed and garden tools. In addition, the council keeps records of all improvements done in community gardening and the number of households benefiting from the projects together with timeframe of the project.

The ward officer for AGRITEX was also crucial since he is the one responsible for the training of farmers on the types of crops to adopt based on suitability. He had first hand information on community gardeners' daily experiences and was aware of the challenges they face.

The project officer of Caritas was of importance since he availed information on the motive behind establishment of community gardens in the study area, the criteria they used to select beneficiaries of the project, how they assisted the beneficiaries and other organizations which assisted them in carrying out the project.

Semi structured interviews were employed to gather information on impact of community gardens on household food security. Semi structured interviews were conducted with all key informants hereon identified and named. The researchers personally administered the interview at the interviewee's workplace using an interview guide consisting of a list of questions prepared well before the interview day.

### Sample Size Determination

Probability sampling was employed in this study. All 4 gardens in Chaka ward were selected for sampling which are Kurima Ishungu garden, Tapfuma garden, Mushandi garden and Kudya zveziya garden. Stratified random sampling was employed in this study where by beneficiaries in each garden were put into two strata based on gender. This was done to ensure equal representation of male and female perspectives relating to community gardens. Simple random sampling was employed in the selection of beneficiaries from each stratum which resulted in 10 people being selected, that is, five males and five females from each garden. These ten beneficiaries per each garden constituted 30% of the targeted 120 total populations of beneficiaries of the gardens. This made data collected representative of the population under study.

It also gave a sample size of forty beneficiaries to whom questionnaires were distributed.

### Questionnaire Design and Administration

In this study both closed-ended and open-ended questionnaires were used to extract data from garden beneficiaries. Closed ended questions were used because they restricted respondents to choose answers only from particular options which made the data collected unproblematic to analyze. Closed questions allowed the collection of qualitative data on the impact of community gardens on household food security. Open ended questions gave the respondent freedom to decide on side, structure, point and extent of his or her answer. The researchers personally administered the questionnaires targeting only the selected sample of beneficiaries in the study area. This made it possible for the researchers to explain and clarify questions which respondents did not clearly understand.

A total of 40 questionnaires were administered. A drop and pick method was used in questionnaire administration. Questionnaires were dropped and picked the same day. This was done to avoid losing the questionnaires if they stayed uncollected for too long.

### Direct Field Observations

Garden beneficiaries and gardens were targeted for observational research in this study.

This technique was used to compare the performance of community gardens after the exit of Caritas from that during the guidance of Caritas obtained from written documents, questionnaires and interviews.

Observations were conducted during questionnaire distribution. These included types of crops being produced, crop residue visible on different garden sites, types of food being consumed at different households and waste food visible. Photographs were taken as part of observation technique. This method of data capture accompanied the use of cameras for photographing where the researchers took photos of crops under production, food being consumed and crop residue as a way of supporting the research findings.

### Secondary Data

The researchers reviewed literature from Caritas which included project documents, project annual reports and project review reports on community gardens project. The technique was employed since it was vital in providing background information and facts about the project. Also this data was useful in cross checking primary data that was collected in the field.

## **Results and Discussion**

### Socio Demographic Characteristics

#### Sex Composition and age of the Respondents

Of the 40 questionnaires administered, 20 respondents were females and another 20 were males. Each garden was represented by 5 males and 5 females. Age of the respondents ranged from 18 to 85. The elderly (50 years and above) constituted 37.5% of the respondents. Their involvement was high for the reason that they are the most vulnerable group in this community since they cannot perform competitively in other work environments because of their age. Also most of them are widowed and look after grandchildren so they are the ones likely to have households with low livelihood capacity. The young, 0-20years constituted 32.5% of the respondents and all of them indicated that they were orphans and their households were child headed. Those within the age range 21-50years composed of 30% of the respondents.



The middle aged had the least number because this group of people has many opportunities to work in different environments. The interview with the Caritas officer revealed that most people who were targeted in this group were the vulnerable group affected or infected with HIV and AIDS.

### Marital Status

47% of the respondents were widows and widowers and this group constituted the largest number because these were the households with little livelihood capacity who were targeted by the project.

33% comprised of singles and from the information obtained from questionnaires most of them were children coming from child headed households .The married covered only 20% and most of these were those infected by HIV and AIDS who were also targeted by the project to enhance their nutritional status.

### Nature of Household Head

Males dominate household headship in the targeted area as evidenced by 40% of the households being male headed. The dominance of male headship stems from the cultural and religious beliefs that men are the heads of the family. In African culture men have to pay lobola in marriages which reduces women to a subordinate position as they are considered as acquisitions men have made. Child headed households had 32.5% of respondents and most of these were headed by orphans. Female headed households had 27.5% of respondents and these households are mainly headed by widows who took over the positions of heading the family after their husbands had passed away.

### Household Composition

The researchers also sought information on household composition basing on the understanding that the bigger the family size the more food that is required to feed everyone in that particular household. 50% of the respondents had family sizes of between 4-7 people, whilst 25% had family sizes of between 1-4. Another 25% of the respondents had family sizes of above 7.

## Sources of Livelihood in Chaka ward before the set up of Community Gardens by Caritas

Sources of Income before the Introduction of Community Gardens

**Table 1: Source of Income and Percentages of Respondents (N=40)**

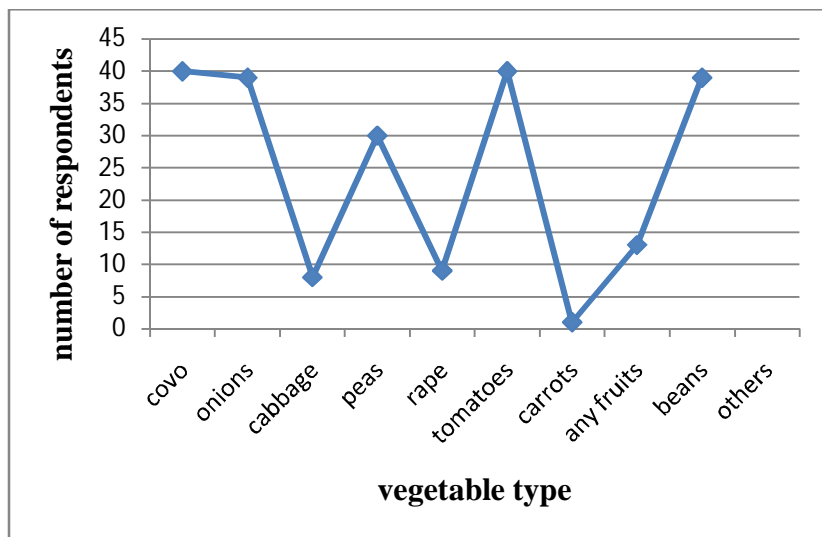
Source of income	No of respondents	Percentage %
Farming	40	100
Fishing	1	2.5
Food for work programmes	40	100
Carpentry	1	2.5
Others	2	57.5

The livelihood of the community is based primarily on rain fed agriculture where 100% of the respondents identified farming as the main source of income (Table 1). However, they also made it clear that due to the drier climate, crop production alone is an unreliable food and income source where 100% of the respondents argued that the income they acquired was inadequate to meet household needs. Climate change was causing crop losses for the community in form of intra season dry spells and extremely low temperatures in other instances. Overreliance on maize has exacerbated the situation as the Chaka Ward community has not adopted production of other drought resistant crops in the form of small grains. Worse still, when asked the question about their occupation before Caritas introduced community gardens, 97.5% of the respondents indicated that there was no one formally employed in their household. That's why 100% of the respondents were resorting to food for work to supplement their livelihood (Table 1).

Lack of access to income presented a severe constraint to households as they struggled to meet major household expenses, most notably for food and education of children. The pattern of liquidating productive assets (including livestock) undermined long-term livelihood security among beneficiary households. However they were other supplements which the respondents said they took as alternatives to increase their income and these include carpentry, fishing and household's casual labour such as building kraals, looking after other people's cattle, migrant labour and food for work. Even with these supplements, most respondents persisted with the argument that the income was inadequate to meet all household needs.

The Caritas officer revealed that the community gardening project targeted the following vulnerable groups: households with low or no productive assets, households with limited livelihood capacities, households with orphans, female headed households, the disabled, elderly, HIV and AIDs infected people.

Types of Vegetables Consumed by Households before Community Gardens



**Figure 2: Vegetables Consumed Before Community Gardens**

Figure 2 illustrate that 100% of the respondents were consuming covo and tomatoes. Onions and beans had 97.5% of the respondents meaning they were also mostly consumed. Beans and Peas were mainly supplied by NGOs like CARE Zimbabwe during their provision of relief food aid. Rarely consumed vegetable types by households were cabbages, rape, fruits and carrots. 2.5% of the respondents revealed that they sometimes consumed okra brought by their children from town.

Benefits of Community Gardens During Caritas’s Assistance

100% of questionnaire respondents indicated the changes in their quality of life since the inception of community gardens. They stated that gardens increased food quantity and diversity by introducing different types of fresh vegetables which were grown in the gardens which included covo, onions, butternut, cabbage, peas, green beans, rape, tomatoes, carrots, fruits, spinach, beans and different types of herbs. Gardens generated income to meet household needs, improved knowledge and skills in vegetable and herb production and utilization, increased farming knowledge and practices in response to climate change to vulnerable households and improved the availability of water for watering the gardens. By providing work to the beneficiaries and making them occupied, gardens were a form of employment.

Respondents indicated that they were gaining team spirit, financial transactions and reduced crime as the locals spend their time in gardening activities.

Community gardens helped to improve the health status of the elderly by providing physical exercise and nutritional foods. From the interview with Caritas officer it was made clear that the number of bed-ridden clients within households that were benefitting from gardens reduced from the initial 10 clients to 4 clients within a period of two years. Chief executive officer of RDC conceded that although there could be other factors at play, generally chronic and acute malnutrition incidences that had been rampant over the past years (2002-2008) have been lowered to manageable levels basing on the information from Chaka clinic.

Gardens have enhanced social cohesions and necessitated the starting of income saving groups. Caritas officer stated that through the Internal Savings and Lending (ISAL) methodology, the groups developed a culture of saving and financial discipline. This in turn increased their resilience when disaster struck. Household economic strengthening was enhanced through self reliance projects. Most households who participated in ISAL projects were empowered to address their financial needs like school fees, grinding mill bills and purchase of food. Other trained ISAL groups have pooled their savings together and started group income generating activities. An example of such a group was from Kurima Ishungu garden. Secondary data obtained from Caritas during its assistance revealed that one of the group members Gogo Musutu once said, "Now I can afford to pay school fees for the 3 orphans left by my elder son as well as buying household basic commodities without facing any challenges. I would like to thank Caritas for this initiative." The group had ventured into broiler poultry production.

They started with an initial 50 chicks which they managed to sell after breeding and from their profits they procured another batch of 100 chicks.

Another group in Tapfuma garden started saving in August 2010 and shared their savings in February. From the \$460.00 the group had saved they managed to purchase pots and dishes for each member (Plate 1) as well as pay school first term fees for 5 children.



Production of Community Gardens during Caritas Assistance



**Plate 2a High production of Vegetable during Caritas Reign**      **Plate 2b High Production of Onions during Caritas Reign**

Plates 2a and 2b show the level of production during Caritas assistance (Caritas 2012). As indicated by the plates the gardens were fruitful and in terms of production 100% of the beneficiaries who responded to questionnaires stated that community gardens were highly productive during Caritas's assistance.

The garden layout ensured that all beneficiaries had equal access to the water source and that the aged or sick had beds sited close to the water source to guarantee similar production. The garden groups were encouraged to adapt Conservation Farming techniques for horticulture. The AGRITEX officer revealed in an interview that normally vegetable gardens required watering four times per week but during Caritas's assistance farmers had to irrigate twice per week because water retention was much better and soil temperatures had significantly reduced because they were practising conservation farming. There was a reduction in the number of times farmers had to weed the vegetable gardens and using soil cover (mulching) without having to turn the soil reduced the amount of labour needed to establish the plots and this contributed to high yields during Caritas's assistance.

During Caritas reign farmers experienced fewer problems with pests and diseases. Germination and survival rates of transplanted seedlings were higher than usual. Farmers explained that the quality of vegetable crops they harvested was better, allowing them to charge higher prices at local markets. They revealed that their own diet had improved because of better quality crops. The garden beneficiaries were encouraged to devote 25% of their growing space to cash crops as they were able to access adequate space to grow enough crops for home consumption.

There was a good butternut produce which attracted markets as far afield as Gweru city. Caritas linked the farmers with Gweru urban markets. Table 4.2 shows how market demand brought income for the farmers. The Caritas officer stated that this information helped farmers to work with targets in order to meet the market demand of these urban markets.

**Table 4.2: Butternut Market Requirements for the Gweru Urban Market**

Dealer	Requirements	Period	Prices
Midlands Agricultural services	500 kg	Weekly	30c per kg
Valley Farm Secrets	200 kg	Weekly	30c per kg
Waldof Fruit and Veg	90 kg	Weekly	35c per kg

Source: (Caritas 2011)

Assistance received from Caritas



**Plate 3 Fencing material being provided to gardens.**



**Plate 4 The borehole in Tapfuma garden constructed with Caritas assistance**

Plate 3 shows fencing material being delivered to garden beneficiaries. From the questionnaires administered, 100% of the respondents indicated they received 1.8m high mesh wire, poles and gate from Caritas for the fencing of their garden sites. Plate 4 shows the borehole that was sunk in Tapfuma garden with the assistance of Caritas. The Caritas officer revealed that initially most gardens had not been fully utilised due to the inadequacy of water for watering the gardens. However Caritas addressed this gap by sinking boreholes adjacent to the gardens to take advantage of the perennial water source that sustained both irrigation and human consumption. To minimise water loss, Caritas has also made a deliberate effort to promote conservation farming, particularly mulching to preserve soil moisture thereby reducing watering frequencies.

Caritas officer explained that they developed a training curriculum/manual in consultation with the Ministry of Agriculture. The manual covered all aspects of crop production for the main staple crop (maize) as well as numerous vegetables. Caritas facilitated training of garden beneficiaries in the following areas: basic garden and layout design, nutrition, seed and nursery management, water conservation and management, conservation farming, horticulture, pest and disease management, soil improvement, harvesting and post harvesting approaches, market training and linkages, vegetable production, leadership skills, and managing cropping calendars.

A committee responsible for the running of the garden was established at each garden and was subsequently trained in horticultural production. A refresher course of AGRITEX extension staff on conservation farming and horticulture was also done by Caritas.

All the gardens were supported with herbs and herbal therapy training reaching about 120 households and the programme established herbal sections in the gardens. Members were trained on the dangers of herbal misuse. Safe written information in vernacular languages on the dangers of herbs was disseminated. Safe herbs recommended by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) were supplied. Some of these are the African wormwood, bulbinella, centella, comfrey, fenel, garlic, ginger, guava leaf, lavender, lemon grass, mint, rosemary, sage, sour fig, thyme, turmeric, yarro and zumbani. 100% of respondents from questionnaires asserted that they were supported with garden tools such as wheelbarrows, shovels and forks, and vegetable starter packs for the initial production. Cement for latrine construction, well lining and corner posts were also provided.



Commenting on ISALs (one of the benefits of community gardens) the Caritas officer revealed that they assisted in creating these ISALs for increasing income generation for garden beneficiaries' households. This was achieved through mobilisation of beneficiary farmers to form Income Savings and Lending Groups (ISALs). ISAL groups are self selecting, self managing peer groups who pool their savings and distribute loans to one another enabling group members to leverage better than any one member can rise alone. The savings and lending groups serve the following purpose: to generate savings for buying of inputs contributing to income and food, to create resilience to shocks commonly experienced by the poor (death, illness, natural or human disasters) – social fund, to provide a potential financial base for community social services, as a way to build 'social fabric' of communities and building community safety nets.

Chief executive officer of Chirumanzu RDC said that Caritas worked with the Ministry of Agriculture, particularly AGRITEX, engineering and irrigation departments to plug a leak at Chizhou dam wall .The leak was successfully plugged using the grouting method. The dam is the source of irrigation water for two gardens that support 60 households. The dam is also used by the local community for fishing, brick moulding and livestock watering purposes.

### **Sustainability of Community Gardens during Caritas Assistance**

In an interview, Caritas officer indicated that recognizing that sustainability is the backbone of all development projects, interventions have been designed in such a manner that outcomes of community gardens will be sustainable. The programme deliberately placed the community, particularly the most vulnerable at the centre of all the interventions. Community members were directly involved in the planning and implementation of the programme. Solutions were not prescribed or dictated; instead they were flexible and adaptable to social conditions. The main aim of the formation of Caritas committees was to ensure sustainability of the programme. This committee comprised of local members who were largely responsible for sourcing all locally available resources, provision of labour and assisting in the monitoring of their own projects and activities at local level. Caritas Gweru played the role of the facilitator while community members were responsible for ensuring that all initiated projects come to fruition.

Emphasis during training of these committees was put on the need for program outputs and an outcome to continue even long after Caritas is gone. Equally important is the fact that the beneficiaries themselves were taught on the importance of the fact that the community gardens belong to them and therefore should take care of them. The Caritas committee was at the forefront of monitoring and evaluation of the project thereby giving it a sense of community ownership.

The use of the community based management strategy ensured sustainability of the programmes. AGRITEX officer pointed out in an interview that he was involved in programme facilitation because he was ward based. Local government structures were also utilized in the implementation of the interventions as specified by the Chief Executive Officer of the Rural District Council and these included village heads, chiefs, councillors and ward coordinators. Beneficiaries themselves formed committees responsible for looking after the resources they benefitted from the programme. The Caritas officer revealed that water point committees were formed for maintenance of water points; garden committees were formed to run and coordinate production and marketing activities of the gardens. Another important factor that ensured sustainability was that the local leadership was in full support of all the interventions and the community developed a high sense of ownership and pride of the projects.

The Caritas officer mentioned that participation is a critical ingredient in ensuring community appreciation and sustainability of projects. The programme was thus designed in such a manner that participation of beneficiaries is meaningful and contributes to the long term outcomes of the programme. Communities were responsible for identification and selection of beneficiaries and Caritas came in for verification of beneficiaries only. This selection was led by Caritas committees and ward development structures. The beneficiaries participated in the implementation of the programme by mobilization of locally available resources. In the establishment of nutrition gardens beneficiaries provided labour for the erection of fence and pegging of the sites. They were also responsible for garden site selection.

The Chief Executive officer of Chirumanzu Rural District Council (RDC) explained that the community garden activity is an all year round enterprise which sustained rural households. This was an assurance that something was going to come out be it winter or summer season. Crop varieties grown were those that were on high demand to an extent that market was readily available.

The Caritas officer revealed that field days that they introduced were promotional days that encouraged competition and motivation among the gardeners to an extent that it boosted future productions in their gardens.

#### Sustainability of Community Gardens and Source of Market after the Exit of Caritas

After the exit of Caritas there were many challenges affecting the progress of community gardens mainly because the community was already used to the supervision of Caritas. On their own it was challenging to apply all the techniques they had been taught to sustain the project. 100% of the respondents from questionnaires stated that the gardens reduced their capacity to supplement food after the exit of Caritas and the income they were getting reduced significantly. This was mainly because garden beneficiaries failed to manage their income so that they could have reserved some to buy more diversified seeds to maintain and even improve their production. Henceforth their vegetable crop diversity reduced.

Respondents from questionnaires indicated that there were conflicts in the management of the mushroom project due to lack of cooperation and rampant cases of theft were reported to the extent that the project stopped functioning in November 2012.

The members lost enthusiasm to persist with the project which had no signs of progressing. The Caritas officer stated that another obstacle affecting the sustainability of these community gardens and their production comes from local government institutions which participated in the implementation of these projects during Caritas's assistance such as RDC and AGRITEX. These are no longer partaking in any activity of the community gardens, even just visiting them to monitor how they are progressing and offering some suggestions or solutions to their setbacks.

The existence of government extension staff at ward level and a local leadership that is committed to develop ensures that the programme is sustainable but at this juncture the pulling out of Caritas demolished their cooperation as stated by the Caritas officer in an interview.

More so Caritas committees which were key in ensuring sustainability through programme monitoring and support to beneficiaries lost their track after the exit of Caritas, reason being that they were not benefitting anything since the little supplements they were getting from Caritas were no longer offered.

100% of the respondents from questionnaires stated that their main source of market after Caritas had handed over the project to the community was the garden site. They could no longer access markets from Gweru which Caritas used to link them with. 22,5% of the beneficiaries who responded to questionnaires asserted that sometimes they would sell their produce at Chaka Growth point and at schools during periods of better produce. 12,5% of the respondents from questionnaires specified that they also moved door to door and 2,5% said they would sometimes sell at social gatherings. The AGRITEX officer explained that there is no reason to link the farmers with influential markets because their production is below the standard required by such markets and this is the reason why they end up resorting to selling their produce at garden sites.

## **Conclusion**

Before the implementation of community gardens by Caritas, the main source of livelihood for people living in Chaka Ward 2 was farming. When community gardens were introduced, they became an indispensable part of the poor rural household's livelihood.

The people of Chaka Ward benefited the socio-economic services from gardening as it continued to be the source of income for the beneficiaries of the gardens. Income derived was used for paying school fees, buying assets, agricultural inputs and buying groceries and food. Evaluations have confirmed that the benefits resulted in improvement in the quality of life of the rural people during the assistance of Caritas. Field days, monitoring and evaluation by extension workers, and the practice of gardening all year-round has transformed gardening to sustain food security in the district.

Notwithstanding, the researcher also discovered that there was a difference between the performance of gardens during Caritas's assistance and after its exit. The performance of gardens started deteriorating since the project was handed over to the ownership of the local community.

The challenges facing the beneficiaries in maintaining or improving the production capacity of community gardens under which they were functioning during Caritas assistance are: poor management, conflicts, water problems and inadequate income to buy more diversified seeds. The study revealed that community gardens were more sustainable in enhancing household food security during Caritas assistance than after its exit. Therefore from this study the researchers conclude that NGOs sponsored projects are not a panacea to community development in developing countries like Zimbabwe because they only benefit the community for a short period during the phase which the NGOs will be assisting the community. After the exit of NGOs the projects will face challenges that make them unsustainable because NGOs do not live a strong base for the community to continue on their own without assistance. It also seems beneficiary communities do not integrate themselves adequately into the projects to make them their own. They seem to quickly develop a 'donor dependency syndrome' which make them fail to sustain projects beyond donor assistance and guidance.

## **Recommendations**

Stakeholders involved in the implementation of community gardens such as Rural District Council and AGRITEX should continue to work with the community even after the Nongovernmental Organization has handed over the project to the community in order to help them where they need assistance in terms of solving challenges.

Chirumanzu Rural District Council should create a disciplinary committee to control behaviour and conflicts in community gardens to ensure progress so that during times they cannot visit the community to hear their concerns there will be a committee responsible for that.

When implementing programs Caritas should encourage greater community empowerment by giving local people and communities more power to make decisions. This involves making it easier for communities to organise themselves and have a greater voice, building trust between communities and local institutions and giving communities the tools to do more for themselves so that when Caritas hands over the project to the community it will carry on successfully.

Caritas committee created in the community should make an effort to find good markets for the produce in gardens so that when the gardens are highly productive they can also sell and gain income to buy more diversified seeds and even use the money to restart ISALs which had been affected.

## References

- Auret, D (1990). A Decade of Development in Zimbabwe 1980-1990. Mambo Press, Gweru.
- Caritas (2012). Caritas Operating Manual. Mambo Press, Gweru
- Chambers and Conway, G (1991). Sustainable Rural Livelihoods: Practical Concepts for the 21st Century. IDS Discussion paper, no. 296. Institute of Development Studies.
- Ellis, F. (1998). Survey Rural Livelihood Diversity in Developing Countries: Analysis, Policy, Methods. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Eriksen S., O'Brien K., and Rosentrater L., (2008): Climate change in Eastern and Southern Africa: impacts, vulnerability and adaptation. Department of Sociology and Human Geography, University of Oslo
- Local Harvest (2009). Challenges and Solutions to Community Gardens: Alternative Communal Farmer. Florida.
- Matsa, M. (2013) Gweru community Gardens: Renewed hope for Vulnerable Urbanites. Review of Social Studies, Law and Psychology, vol. vii.no.1 Pages 133-147
- Middleton, J. (2009) Community Gardening. University of Missouri, Columbia.
- Moyo, S. and Tevera, D. (2000). Environmental Security in Southern Africa. SAPES Trust, Harare.
- New Farmer (2004). Zimbabwe's Leading Voice of Agriculture: Volume 9 number 4. Ministry of Agriculture, Harare.
- Scoones, I.(2010) African Issues: Zimbabwe's Land Reform: Myths and Realities.Weaver Press, Harare.