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## **Zimbabwean Farmers Turn to Agroecology to Feed Their Families** **[1,014 words]**

**Headline:** Global News Dispatches: 4 Stories

**Credit Line:** from the [Inter Press Service](#) / [Globetrotter News Service](#)

**Note to Editors:** This is a selection of news wire reports that have been edited to be relevant for audiences for the next two weeks. You are welcome to select and publish individual items or the whole stack.

**Headlines in This News Package:**

- ‘No’ to Sex Education Fuels Early Pregnancies in Central America
- Zimbabwean Farmers Turn to Agroecology to Feed Their Families
- How Nigeria’s Legal System Is Failing to Safeguard Widows’ Rights
- Vulnerable Women Suffer the Worst Face of Discrimination in Argentina

When Nelson Mudzingwa arrived in the Shashe farming area in Mashava in Masvingo, about 294 kilometers from Zimbabwe’s capital of Harare, in the early 2000s, the land was barren, with no hope that the soils could be suitable for farming.

The area used for cattle ranching had turned into a semi-arid one.

Livestock was dying due to hunger while trees succumbed to deforestation, and water levels in the nearby Shashe River had decreased because of siltation.

More than two decades later, the Shashe farming area has transformed into a reputable farming hub.

This was done by employing agroecology techniques, including using locally available resources such as growing traditional grains, rehabilitating the area by planting trees,

water harvesting to conserve water, and venturing into poultry to get manure to improve soil fertility.

“When I harvest crops in the fields, I make sure that I put aside seed in preparation for the next season,” says Mudzingwa, the 53-year-old smallholder farmer who was born in Chiwundura in Midlands Province, a central part of Zimbabwe.

“By digging contours that channel water in our fields, we have improved the chances of receiving rainfall in Shashe. Even during the dry season, we receive rainfall which was not common when we first arrived.”

Shashe farming area has evolved into a learning area where farmers around Zimbabwe and beyond the borders come to learn agroecology at the Shashe Agroecology School, a center of agroecology, of which Mudzingwa is one of the founders.

Zimbabwe, just like the rest of the southern African region, has been experiencing climate change-induced prolonged droughts and incessant rainfall resulting in floods.

Climate change does not discriminate.

Every living being must pay.

The majority of Zimbabweans live in rural areas, and climate change, caused by human activities, is a major threat to their livelihood.

They rely on agriculture to feed their families as well as earn a living by selling some of the produce.

Government and nongovernmental organizations have been working hand in hand to introduce measures that reduce the impacts of climate change.

In Shashe, agroecology farming is basically conserving the land and environment.

This concept involves strengthening the resilience of smallholder farmers through the diversification of agroecosystems.

That is organic soil management and water harvesting for conservation.

In the Shashe farming area, smallholder farmers like Mudzingwa grow a variety of food crops, including grains, cereals, legumes, vegetables, fruit trees, and medicinal plants.

They also rear livestock, including cows, sheep, goats, pigs, and chickens.

The grains such as sorghum, millet, and rapoko are drought-resistant crops meaning smallholder farmers can still have a bumper harvest even during droughts.

Everything on the Mudzingwa’s farm is recycled.

“Livestock are our biggest source of manure. We collect crop residues from the fields and feed the cattle. Then we collect waste and make organic manure in compost,” says Mudzingwa, who is an agriculturist by profession.

The smallholder farmers in this area have fish ponds where they farm different species like catfish and breams.

Mudzingwa says fish farming, poultry, and crops depend on each other for survival.

“We feed fish with chicken droppings and worms. We keep worms in the composts we make for manure. The water from the fish ponds after harvesting is channeled to the garden because it is highly nutritious,” he says.

Another smallholder farmer is Elizabeth Mpofu, who has fed and clothed her three children and one grandchild using proceeds from her agroecology venture in the Shashe farming area.

She turned to sustainable farming after realizing that rainfed agriculture was no longer viable in this area; she was resettled following the Land Reform Program in the early 2000s.

The chaotic Land Reform Program implemented under President Robert Mugabe saw black farmers taking back their land from the few minority white farmers two decades after Zimbabwe gained its independence from the British colonialists.

Just like Mudzingwa, Mpofu is into fish farming, growing drought-resistant crops like millet and sorghum, poultry, and water harvesting to conserve moisture in the fields.

Mpofu keeps seeds for the next agriculture season to ensure that traditional grains critical in providing high yields amid climate change do not run into extinction.

Mudzingwa and Mpofu supply other farmers in Shashe and around the country with seeds and pass agroecology knowledge and skills to them.

Mpofu has planted trees and maintained indigenous trees near her plot as part of her reforestation efforts.

Mpofu’s family relies on agroecology.

She keeps some produce for her family after harvesting and sells the excess to other residents in Mashava or Masvingo, the province’s city.

“Agroecology is the way to go. As a woman, I have been able to look after myself and my family,” Mpofu, a widower, tells IPS.

The agroecology initiative in Mashava and Bikita has reached about 500 smallholder farmers, says Simba Guzha, a regional project manager for Voluntary Service Overseas, a charity supporting farmers like Mpofu and Mudzingwa.

Guzha tells IPS that affordable and less resource-input farming practices like agroecology are important to enhance agricultural production and increase food security at the household level.

“In Zimbabwe, agriculture production is mainly rainfed, and smallholder farmers in marginalized areas contribute more than 70 percent of food production in the country, yet they lack... the financial capacity to purchase synthetic inputs.”

“In Mashava, most soils are loamy sands... which are prone to acidification, leaching, and poor structure and can barely support plant life, the use of organic fertilizers and green cover crops that bind the soil help to replenish such soils and enhance microbial activity that supports plant life while sequestering carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.”

Guzha says agroecology in Mashava has empowered women and the youth, who are usually marginalized and vulnerable.

“It has enhanced their productive capacity as well as empowered them to have diversified food sources and income-generating activities,” he says.

“Agroecology promotes growing of indigenous or orphan crops and diversity that are well suited to low rainfall areas like Mashava, hence, farmers are guaranteed of getting something in case of severe droughts. It has promoted local diets and culturally acceptable foods that are nutritious and healthy for the local people.”