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ZFU Newsletter

ZIMBABWE FARMERS' UNION



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Edited by
Shadreck Hungwe
Hazel Denhere
Tadiwanashe Grand
Designed and produced by
Tadiwanashe Grand

X @zfu_official
Facebook Zimbabwe Farmers' Union

EDITOR'S NOTE

Cultivating more than crops

This issue opens in Gweru, where farmers, input suppliers, seed houses and Government officials gathered for the ZFU 86th Annual Congress under the theme "Harnessing Innovation for Resilience". Producer prices, the El Niño forecast and the push for value addition ran through the speeches. Our congress pages carry the highlights, followed by a photo feature.

Further on, we turn to land. Women in Chisumbanje, Machona and Vheneka describe what a smaller plot and scarcer grazing mean for their households, and two women tell in their own words what it was like to lose property and land after the death of a husband or father. We close with a FACE Project success story from Shamva.

Happy reading!

Tadiwanashe Grand

86TH ANNUAL CONGRESS · GWERU

Farmers call for urgent review of producer prices

ZFU president Dr Jameson Jawi says fixed prices, set against rising fuel, energy and fertiliser costs, are undermining the viability of farming.

BY PATRICK CHITUMBA



ZFU President Dr Jameson Jawi delivering his speech at the ZFU 86th Annual Congress

1/3

Diesel prices have risen by more than a third, says Dr Jawi.

THE THREE ASKS

1. Review producer prices to reflect true production costs
2. Distribute inputs early under the Presidential Input Programme
3. Accelerate the title deeds rollout

Farmers have called for an urgent review of producer prices to reflect rising production costs, warning that fixed prices amid escalating fuel, energy and fertiliser costs are undermining the viability of agriculture.

Dr Jawi made the call while officially opening the 86th ZFU Congress in Gweru, under the theme "Harnessing Innovation for Resilience", against a forecast of El Niño-induced drought in 2026-27.

He said the mismatch between producer prices and production costs was putting farmers under growing pressure, with mechanisation and irrigation out of reach for many. "**Mechanisation and irrigation, which are essential** for a resilient farming system, are unaffordable for most producers. Producer prices haven't kept up," he said.

The conflict in the Middle East had pushed up business costs, he added, while energy and global fertiliser prices remained volatile.

Market uncertainty compounded the pressure: last season's liberalised grain marketing left smallholders with poor aggregation and unclear prices, and tobacco growers endured depressed prices.

Even so, farmers remained committed to food and nutrition security, turning increasingly to conservation agriculture, small grains and livestock.

Dr Jawi urged farmers to adopt climate-smart practices, digital climate information tools and drought-tolerant seed. He **implored** Government for early input distribution under the Presidential Input Programme and a faster title deeds rollout, **underlining that** secure tenure gives farmers the confidence to invest.

Resolutions from the congress will be shared with Government for action. "ZFU is prepared to collaborate, innovate and lead the charge towards a more resilient and equitable food system," said Dr Jawi. ■

86TH ANNUAL CONGRESS · GWERU

Farmers face El Niño threat as Government rolls out drought plan and fee cuts

Agriculture Minister Dr Anxious Masuka warns of possible one-third maize yield losses and outlines a six-pillar National Drought Plan.

BY DELICIOUS MATHUTHU



Dr Axious Masuka the Minister for Agriculture, Mechanisation and Water Resources Development

1/3

Possible loss of rain-fed maize yield under a strong El Niño season, the Minister warned.

Zimbabwean farmers must innovate or risk losing up to a third of rain-fed maize yields under a predicted strong El Niño season, Agriculture, Mechanisation and Water Resources Development Minister Dr Anxious Masuka has warned.

Speaking at the official opening of the ZFU 86th Annual Congress at The Village Lodge in Gweru, he said meteorological forecasts point to below-normal rains throughout the 2026/27 season. “If left unchecked, climate change could reduce our rain-fed maize yield by as much as a third by mid-century. In light of this, innovation becomes a necessity,” he told delegates.

The Minister described agriculture as the country’s largest employer and its primary **defense** against hunger. Yet farmers remain price-takers, he said, carrying heavy production costs and a long list of taxes, development levies, land unit charges, environmental penalties, veterinary fees, toll gates(is toll gates or toll fees?) and licensing obligations. “These additional costs do not enhance productivity but rather increase the financial burden of farming.”

Government has already approved a downward review of several fees and levies.

A National Drought Plan built on six pillars has now been activated. ZFU is represented on three of them, and Dr Masuka said the union’s vision of a resilient, commercialised and viable sector aligns with National Development Strategy 2. ■

THE NATIONAL DROUGHT PLAN: SIX PILLARS

1. Rebuild the Strategic Grain Reserve in advance
2. Accelerate Pfumvudza/Intwasa and climate-smart practices
3. Coordinate financing from Treasury and partners
4. Secure livestock feed and water points
5. Pre-position imports where needed
6. Strengthen early-warning systems down to village level

BEYOND THIS SEASON

Longer term measures: land, water and technology

The Minister's speech also set out what Government plans for the years ahead, and what it expects of the private sector and of farmers' own organisations.

1 million

Target hectares under Pfumvudza/Intwasa, up from 718,000 last season, through better basin preparation, mulching and timely planting.

500,000

Hectares of irrigation targeted by 2030 under ARDA and the Vision 2030 Accelerator Model, through joint ventures giving communal, A1 and A2 farmers a real stake.

6,000+

Extension officers receiving new tools, including artificial intelligence, satellite imagery and drone surveillance.



"We want to leave more of the value with the farmers."

Local seed systems, tissue-culture potato production and biological alternatives to imported chemicals are being strengthened, Dr Masuka said. Import levies on maize, soybeans, soya meal and wheat will channel proceeds into the Agricultural Revolving Fund to finance irrigation and farmer development.

He urged delegates to hold Government accountable for delivering these innovations at ward and village level, not merely on demonstration plots.

The Minister also invited the private sector and the development community to collaborate. "The government lacks the financial resources and the intention to mechanise, irrigate and digitise the agricultural sector independently," he said.(unclear senetnce this one!)

He declared the congress open, confident that farmers will assess conditions honestly and adapt before harvests are lost. (another unclear sentence – Conditions?■



86TH ANNUAL CONGRESS · GWERU

“Farmers must reap more value from agriculture”

DR ANXIOUS MASUKA AT THE ZFU CONGRESS

85%

Share of the 359 million kg of tobacco sold to date that was grown by smallholder farmers.

US$9 800

Average annual earnings per smallholder tobacco farmer, according to the Minister.

Farmers must move beyond selling raw produce and embrace value addition, aggregation and stronger participation across agricultural value chains, Dr Masuka told the ZFU Congress in Gweru.

“I urge you farmers to henceforth stop treating agriculture as a subsistence activity and instead turn your farms into profitable businesses,” he said. Government wants agriculture to become an engine of industrialisation, poverty elimination, import substitution and export diversification.

“For far too long, farmers have sold commodities in their raw form, whereas the value is at the next node of the value chain,” he said.

He asked ZFU to work with Government to aggregate produce and promote value addition, starting at ward level.

On market governance, he said Statutory Instrument 87 of 2025 is part of reforms meant to ensure farmers receive a fairer share. ZFU has previously backed the instrument, which provides for more local sourcing of agricultural commodities. “Often, the farmer is taken advantage of in most value chains, and we must work with ZFU to reverse this.”

Government has also approved cuts to fees, permits and levies in dairy, horticulture, water and border operations, and the ministry will assess whether farmers feel the benefit at ward and village level. On the 15 percent import duty removed from fertiliser, he said: “We expect fertiliser to be 15 percent cheaper for farmers. So, that is what we want to check.”

The aim, the Minister said, is to place agriculture at the centre of industrialisation and growth. ZFU itself has been promoting agribusiness-oriented farming and village business units.

GWERU · HARNESSING INNOVATION FOR RESILIENCE

The 86th Annual Congress in pictures













THE 86TH ANNUAL CONGRESS IN PICTURES

















THE 86TH ANNUAL CONGRESS IN PICTURES













WOMEN AND LAND · CHECHECHE

When the land shrinks, women carry the burden

For women farmers in Chisumbanje, Machona and Vheneka, the loss of farming and grazing land threatens livelihoods, food security and their say over their own future.



Dehusked maize illustrates the 0.5-hectare plot allocated to one farmer.

In the communities of Chisumbanje, Machona and Vheneka in the Checheche area, land is life. It is where families grow food, keep livestock, earn income and build a future for their children. For generations, farmers have depended on these lands for crops and for grazing cattle, goats and other livestock.

Today, affected farmers say, large areas of their former farming land have been allocated to Green Fuel, leaving many with only about 0.5 hectares each. For women, the consequences reach far beyond the loss of cropland.

More than land: a voice

Women are at the centre of household food production and rural livelihoods. They cultivate crops, care for livestock, take part in savings groups and use farm income for food, school fees and healthcare. Yet women in the affected communities say they have not been adequately included in decisions about land that shapes their lives.

“How can decisions about a woman’s livelihood be made without giving her a meaningful voice in those decisions?”

For women who have spent years cultivating these fields, being left with a fraction of the land can undermine their ability to stay economically productive. The concern is not only access to land, but participation, voice and agency.

Half a hectare, and where will the livestock go?

Livestock are an important livelihood asset. Cattle, goats, sheep and chickens provide meat, milk, manure and income, and they serve as household wealth during difficult economic periods.

Farmers say the shrinking of communal and agricultural space is putting pressure on grazing. With less

land, livestock farmers may have to contend with:

- inadequate grazing for animals;
- competition over the remaining grazing areas;
- less pasture during dry periods;
- more pressure on water resources;
- difficulty maintaining livestock numbers; and
- fewer chances to use livestock as an income and livelihood strategy.

A woman who loses productive cropland may still depend on goats or cattle to support her family. But where will those animals graze?

The hidden burden

When grazing becomes scarce, women often feel it first in the household. Livestock need water, feed and care. When natural grazing falls short, households may spend more on supplementary feed or travel further for grazing and water. For women already responsible for food production and care work, that can mean more unpaid labour. The loss of grazing land becomes a gender issue, not simply an environmental or agricultural one.

Development must not make women invisible

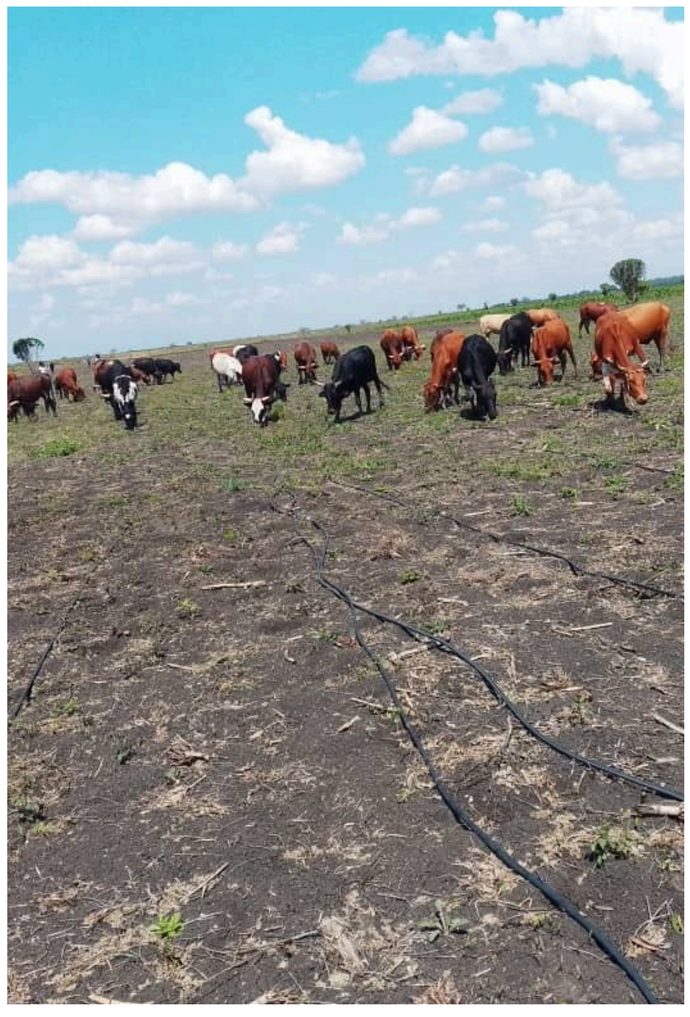
Commercial agricultural investment can create opportunities for growth, jobs and markets. But affected communities argue that development should also protect the livelihoods of the people who depend on the land. For the women of Chisumbanje, Machona and Vheneka, that means taking part in decisions about their land, production and livestock. It means transparent information and meaningful consultation, and livelihood options that do not leave families struggling to produce enough food or keep their animals.

A call for inclusive, gender-responsive solutions

The experience of these communities points to development approaches that look beyond the hectares allocated to farmers. The question should also be: what happens to women's livelihoods when productive land and grazing areas become limited? Any response must consider women's participation in decision-making, household food security, livestock production, access to grazing and water, and the economic opportunities open to affected families.

Women should not be treated as beneficiaries of decisions made elsewhere. They are farmers, livestock owners, economic actors and rights-holders whose voices matter.

For the women of Checheche, the fight is not only for land. It is for dignity, participation, economic security and the right to be heard. When land shrinks, women's burdens grow, and their voices must be at the centre of every conversation about the future of these communities. ■



Cattle damaging drip irrigation pipes in the 0.5-hectare plots, highlighting the severe shortage of grazing land.

0.5 ha

Roughly what many affected farmers say they are left with.

Their land may be shrinking. Their voices must not.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS · WOMEN AND LAND RIGHTS

“Nothing was mine anymore”

Mai Chimuti lost her husband in 2002. Here she tells what happened to the family’s cattle, goats, sheep and land, and what she did next.

Names Changed for Anonymity

My name is Mai Chimuti. I am a widow. My husband died on 17 November 2002.

My husband and I had 13 cattle, 21 goats, 12 sheep, a house in town, a motorbike, and a field of three hectares with a four roomed house on it. We had three children, all girls. The eldest was nine, the next was five, and the youngest was only three months old.

What hurt most is that while I was still mourning my husband, his relatives took the cattle record book and changed the name on it to theirs. A month later they asked me for the title deeds to the house in town. They also asked, “Your husband told us he wanted to buy a car, so where is the money?”

Then they said there was a money problem and sold the goats and sheep. Within ten months only six goats and three sheep were left.

I was still young, 29 years old, and I did not question them. I thought perhaps this is how things are done. When they kept asking about the title deeds, my elder brother told me to say he would speak to the lawyer who has them. After that they went quiet.

They began to farm the field while I was at work. I would arrive to find they had already planted their seed. When the children started school, I asked to sell a goat or a sheep to pay their fees, but they refused.

One day I spoke to a grandson, the child of my husband’s sister. He told me, “Grandmother, your case has been settled behind your back. They said that because you gave birth to girls only, you are not entitled to any property. And the field is now being farmed by the grandmother.” From then on nobody would talk to me or answer my questions. I saw that nothing was mine anymore.

I cried whenever I thought about it. The cattle, sheep and goats began to die. I told my own relatives, who helped me, and I started projects. I began keeping 500 chickens. Today all my children are working, and two are married. Their father’s money was all taken by his relatives, but I raised and educated my children on my own.

So I want to encourage all women to come to the RWA meeting so we can discuss these issues.

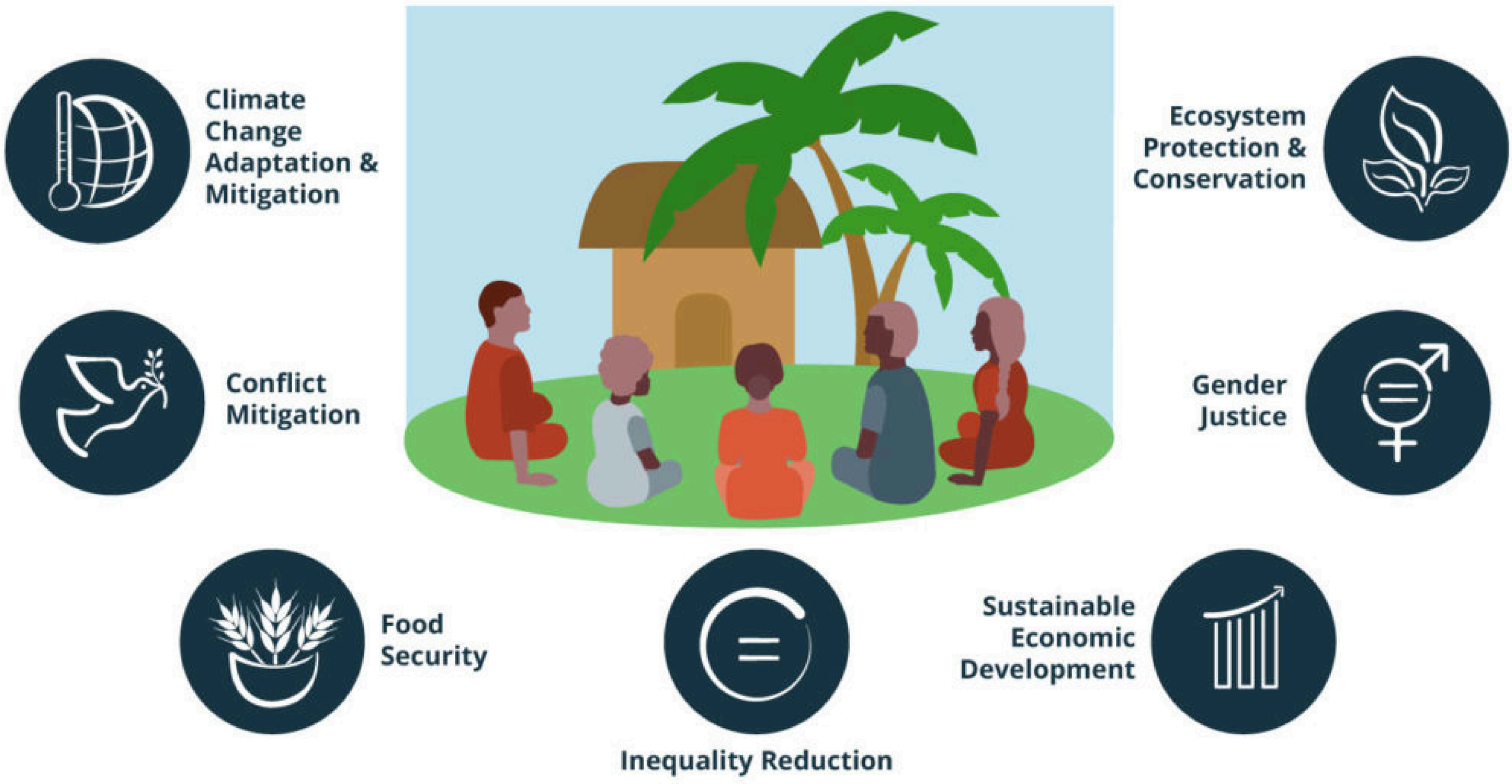
Tomorrow it could be you, with nobody to help, and you may end up ill with high blood pressure and stress.

Know also that in our country, and in our culture, it is still very rare for women to hold land in their own name with legal papers. It is only about ten percent.



Even today I run my projects on rented land, at the home of orphaned children who live in South Africa. I tried many times to apply for land from the Ministry of Lands, but the men I was competing with got there first. I applied five times for mining opportunities too, without success.

If we speak with one voice as women, our government may turn and look at us. Our RWA meeting will help us share ideas and see what we can do to improve our lives. Our children will be able to go to school, and when we are old, they will be able to look after us. ■



“Just go with your four children.”

My father passed away in 1988. After his death, my mother was told she would be inherited as a wife by my father’s younger brother, and she refused. Because she refused, she was chased away from my father’s homestead and told, “Just go with your four children.”

My mother was stripped of all of my father’s wealth: the household property, the fields, and even the compensation money from his workplace, which she never received. My father’s elder brother went to the company with his girlfriend to claim the money, lying that she was the wife of the deceased.

We ended up growing up at my mother’s maternal home. My mother later died of hypertension in 1999. ■



FACE PROJECT · SUCCESS STORY

ZFU facilitates stakeholder response to land and resource concerns at Oxley Farm, Shamva





By Nigel Chikomba

Background and issue

Farmers at Oxley Farm in Shamva District raised concerns over a gold processing plant on about 30 hectares of traditional grazing land. They suspect the land was allocated irregularly, and worry about losing grazing land, livestock safety and the environmental impact of mining on surrounding farms.

How the issue emerged

The matter reached the ZFU Mashonaland Central Provincial Office after farmer sensitisation engagements in Shamva under the FACE Project, which gave farmers a platform to understand their rights and raise concerns.

Impact on farmers and livestock

Farmers also reported that four goats died after reportedly being exposed to substances associated with the mining activities. The circumstances have not yet been independently verified. The owner of the processing operation reportedly compensated the affected farmer.

ZFU response

ZFU escalated the matter to Agritex, the Ministry of Lands, the Environmental Management Agency (EMA) and the Ministry of Mines and Mining Development, so the concerns are weighed from land-use, agricultural, environmental and mining perspectives.

Next steps

A multi-stakeholder committee is preparing to visit the site to verify the farmers' concerns, assess land use and environmental implications and establish the facts about the plant. A report and recommendations will follow.

Success and significance

Although the matter is ongoing, ZFU's intervention has moved the concern from community level into a formal multi-stakeholder process, linking farmers with duty bearers.

KEY OUTCOME TO DATE

Farmers' concerns have been formally escalated to the relevant authorities, and a multi-stakeholder process is underway, with a site assessment being prepared.

ZFU'S CONTRIBUTION

- Created a platform for farmers to raise concerns through FACE Project sensitisation.
- Documented and escalated farmers' concerns to relevant authorities.
- Facilitated engagement among farmers and key government and technical stakeholders.
- Promoted a coordinated multi-stakeholder investigation.
- Advocated for protection of farmers' resources, livestock and livelihoods, with land, environmental and mining considerations taken into account.



Zimbabwe Farmers' Union

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Head office 5 Van Praagh Milton Park, Harare