

# Sustaining Rural Livelihoods Through Donor Funded Agricultural Inputs Scheme In Zimbabwe: The Case Of Goromonzi District.

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper assesses the donor funded agricultural input supply scheme to ensure food security in Goromonzi District, Zimbabwe. The aim is to assess the sustainability of donor funded agricultural input supply scheme. Since 2008 local NGOs unrolled agricultural input supply schemes, giving vulnerable households free packs of maize seed and fertilizers. Qualitative and quantitative approaches were used in the study, questionnaires were administered to a sample of sixty respondents, key informants were interviewed and documentary information was collected. The study found high prevalence of diseases, ill health and high rate of school drop outs as poverty indicators in Caledonia. Land is either state or communally owned which hampers development of long term agricultural projects, following the expansion of the city of Harare and Ruwa. The scheme has improved availability of fertilizers, maize seeds and improved crop productivity to disadvantaged households. However, it covered few residents and only supported maize production which has poor market price. Smallholder farmers still lack access to vital livelihoods assets such as large piece of land and draught power. Thus, the donor community should aim at reducing vulnerability and empower rural communities through facilitating access to livelihood assets, not just providing a short-term relief to poverty challenges.

**Keywords:** rural livelihoods, donor funded, agricultural inputs scheme, sustainability, poverty

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Rural communities in Zimbabwe rely on dry-land subsistence crop farming and animal rearing to ensure food security (ZMTP, 2011-2015). Thus, the donor aid agencies have been involved in distributing free agricultural inputs to farmers, to improve crop production particularly during periods of natural disasters, harsh economic environments or unjust government policies that increase vulnerability of communities. When properly targeted, communities can regain crop and livestock productivity while recovering from their shocks. Caledonia community is a marginalized agro- based community which survives on tilling small pieces of land parceled to its residents by the government of Zimbabwe. The community consists of vulnerable groups of people such as child- headed families, single and double orphans, single parents, mentally challenged, the elderly and the chronically ill (mostly the HIV infected). These groups of people are economically and socially excluded from the productive activities in communities. It is on this basis that, locally registered NGOs, are running agricultural input supply schemes to improve crop production, from 2008 to 2011. However, in recent times critics have questioned the appropriateness of the approach of directly handing out free inputs to farmers on the basis that it undermines the traditional private agricultural input markets and also that it promotes the dependency syndrome among farmers (Chambers and Conway, 1992). To date however, there are no indications of food security among the disadvantaged households.

The residents continue to survive from hand to mouth and suffer from poverty characterized by lack of access to basic needs such as food, medication, household living incomes and decent accommodation. Therefore this paper needs to assess the sustainability of these donor funded agricultural input supply schemes in ensuring food security as well as alleviating poverty (Millennium Development Goal 1) in poor communities. Research has revealed that agricultural and rural development strategies benefit the community through collaboration between government research, extension organizations and NGOs (Can-oil, 1992). Donors in particular have begun to call for more NGO involvement in programs that have traditionally been implemented through the public sector, and there has been a recent upsurge of donor interest in direct-funding south-based NGOs (World Bank, 1991a). However, there is a growing concern among other agencies that NGOs are unintentionally contributing to the neoliberal project of weakening state responsibilities by taking over the operational duties of the state in humanitarian emergencies and even afterwards, ( Pelling, 2003). NGOs are defined here as non-membership development-oriented organizations (Word Bank, 1990). They provide services either directly to the rural poor or to grass-roots membership organizations, and with the local branches of international NGOs that enjoy varying degrees of autonomy. They are therefore distinct from formal and informal membership organizations such as farmers' associations. But even within this definition, there exists wide diversity of origins and philosophy. Baumann (2002) pointed out that, some NGOs were set up by left-leaning professionals or academics in opposition to the politics of government or its support for or indifference to the prevailing patterns of corruption, patronage, or authoritarianism. This is supported by Can-oil (1992), who noted that, some NGOs reject existing social and political structures and see themselves as engines for radical change. This creates tension with existing political structures, which hamper the success of donor funded projects. On the other hand, The Sphere Project (2004) states that, Non-Governmental Humanitarian Agencies (NGHAs) should never, knowingly or through negligence, allow themselves to be used to gather information of political, military or economically

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sensitive nature for governments or other bodies that may serve purposes other than those which are strictly humanitarian, nor would they act as instruments of foreign policies of donor governments. Some NGOs are based on religious principles, others on a broadly humanitarian ethos, and yet others were set up as quasi-consultancy concerns in response to recent donor-funding initiatives; others focus on more gradual change through development of human resources (usually through group formation) to meet their own needs or to make claims on government services; yet others focus more simply on the provision of services (for example advice, input supply) largely within existing structures (UNU/WIDER, 2000). There is a concern that different ideologies and intensions of NGOs impact differently on the projects they implement. One of NGOs' main concerns has been to identify the needs of the rural poor in sustainable agricultural development. They have therefore pioneered a wide range of participatory methods for diagnosis and, in some contexts, have developed and introduced systems approaches for testing new technology, for example in Chile (Word Bank, 1991a). The purpose for locally registered NGOs was to carry out community developmental and humanitarian work involving the deprived children, their families and communities in order to improve the socio-economic conditions. NGO intervention programmes have been particularly prominent in rural agricultural activities in the sub-Saharan region, including Zimbabwe. According to Whiteside and Carr (1997) small holder agriculture remains the major source of livelihood for most of the rural poor, yet it is failing to provide a route out of poverty for the majority, hence the need for NGO intervention to promote agriculture's contribution to community livelihoods.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

Descriptive Survey Research design was used to study the sustainability of donor funded agricultural input supply schemes in Caledonia community, Goromonzi district, Mashonaland East. The method helps in collecting data on human characteristics, attitudes, and behavior. Both qualitative and quantitative approaches were used in this paper. Caledonia community is located in Goromonzi District, in the Mashonaland East Province of Zimbabwe. The community consists of ten sections which are section 1 and 7, 2a, 2b, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, Porta and Manresa section. These have section leaders in place of village heads. There are approximately two thousand five hundred (2500) households in the community, with an average of five family members per household. There are vulnerable groups of people in the community, which include the child headed families, the elderly headed, the chronically ill (particularly the HIV infected), single and double orphans, female headed, the mentally challenged and the physically difference. All these groups were considered as beneficiaries of the donor funded agricultural input supply scheme. The area receives a constant and even annual rainfall of about 640mm and above, (Prichard, 1979). The optimum temperature lies between 20 to 30 °C. There are deep, well drained and aerated sandy soils mostly suitable for tobacco production. However, artificial fertilizers are needed to improve the nutrients of the soil for maize production. Households are closely settled with most of them staying in mud house, cabins and houses made up of torn asbestos. The research targeted three sections, which is thirty percent of the overall 10 sections of Caledonia. Therefore 3 sections were

selected through simple random sampling. A sampling frame, which is a list of names of the 10 sections, was prepared on separate slips of paper. The researcher mixed the slips of paper in a hat, and draw out 3 slips of paper, one at a time. Thus the researcher selected section 8, Porta and Manresa sections from the list of 10 sections. According to the Central Statistics Office population charts (2010) Manresa had a population size of 115 households while Porta and Section 8 had 100 households 85 households, respectively. Thus, the total households of the 3 sections were 300. The researcher selected a sample of 20 percent of the 300 households. This is supported by Ott (1993) who noted that the sample size should be at least 10 percent of study population size. The researcher used proportional sampling to select 60 households from the 3 sections. According to Beardshaw (2001), this is where the sample drawn from each section is proportional to the population size of that section. Therefore, the researcher draws one fifth of each section to attain even results and thus a sample size of 60 households was selected (table 1).

**Table 1:** Sampled households

Section	Number of Households	Sample size
Section 8	115	23
Porta	100	20
Manresa	85	17
Total	300	60

In the field, the researcher used systematic sampling to select the sample from the three sections. Household lists of the three sections were collected from the section leaders. Every 5<sup>th</sup> household was picked, of all the houses that the researcher passes in the 3 sections. Where the researcher could not find the household head, the researcher picked the following household as the 5<sup>th</sup> household. This helped the researcher to spread samples more evenly over the entire population of the 3 sections (Ott, 1993). Thus, the researcher came up sixty households which were given questionnaires.

## 3. RESEARCH FINDINGS

### 3.1 Demographic characteristics of the respondents

#### 3.1.1 Sex Distribution of Respondents

**Table 2:** Sex distribution of respondents, N=60

Sample of respondents	%
Female respondents	43
Male respondents	57
Total	100

The reason for more male respondents (table 2) than female is reflective of the unequal gender representation in Caledonia residents who were recipients of the donor funded agricultural input scheme. This is in line with the Zimbabwe Millennium Development Status Goals Report (2010) which states that, in Zimbabwe, although approximately fifty two (52) percent of the population is women, they are still disproportionately represented in decision making positions. Women are usually responsible for crop production for family consumption and because of their gender-based roles, through firewood collection, timber and non-timber forest harvesting; they have broader conservative knowledge systems which is important for sustainable use of the environment. Therefore failure to include more women in agricultural activities hinder success of donor funded agricultural input supply schemes.

### 3.1.2 Age Distribution of the Respondents

**Table 3:** Respondents Age Range Distribution, N=60

Age Group	Percentage
Less than 25 years	13
26 - 30 years	20
31 – 45 years	33
46 – and above	34
Total	100

The trends in the age distribution reflect that the majority of Caledonia residents, who have been given a piece of land to till, are those who are 25 years and above. Most of those with land for farming are in the old age groups, whereas the youths, who are physically and economically active, have less access to land for farming. This differs from the Principle 21 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development (1992), which states that the creativity, ideals and courage of the youth of the world should be mobilized in order to achieve sustainable development and ensure a better future for all. The youths have innovative skills and are energetic which is needed as human capital in agricultural production, therefore inadequate involvement of the youths in the Agricultural Input Supply Scheme in Caledonia might hamper success of the project in sustaining rural livelihoods.

### 3.1.3 Employment status

**Table 4:** Employment Status, N=60

Respondents category	%
Self-employed farmers	75
Employed as well as farmers	17
Employed and not farmers	8
Total	100

Seventy five (75) percent of respondents (table 4) rely solely on farming and are not employed in any other activities. These people have no reliable source of income to buy agriculture inputs other than agriculture. The trends highlight that some of the smallholder farmers in Caledonia have some sought of employment and therefore have other sources of income besides farming. This enables them to buy inputs such as maize seeds and fertilizers to supplement those agricultural inputs supplied by the donor. However, from the interviews administered to the key informants, it was noted that those that are employed receive a very low wage, which is barely enough to pay children's school fees. Also because of recurrent food shortages, the money is used to buy supplement food for the families. Issues that were raised from the interviews and focused group discussions included that farmers trade their agriculture produce with other commodities they need, but can hardly sell for cash. This is a challenge when the need to buy maize seeds and fertilizers from agro-shops where cash is required.

## 3.2 Contribution of donor funded agricultural input supply schemes to livelihoods.

### 3.2.1 Improvement in Food Security

The study revealed that 18% of the respondents noted that they have attained high food security as a result of the donor funded input supply scheme. This is supported by what some people wrote in their diaries of Stories of Change. It was noted that the fertilizers and maize seeds that were distributed increased their yields. Food was said to be now available in some households which can sustain them to the following season. Some even noted that they can sell the surplus to pay school fees and buy clothing. However, 38% and 32% of the respondents (the majority) stated that they have average and low food security respectively. The scheme improved maize yield for Caledonia resident, though most of the households can hardly sail through to the next season because of large families. Twelve percent (12%) of the respondents mentioned that their households are not food secure and were not beneficiaries of the scheme. This shows that the donor funded agricultural input scheme was not beneficial to every household in Caledonia community; therefore other people remain food insecure.

### 3.2.3 Improvement in household income

Research findings revealed that before the implementation of the donor funded agricultural input supply scheme, 75% of the respondents lived on less than US\$100 per year. This implies that in 2008 the majority of people lived below the poverty datum line, therefore were in absolute poverty as supported by the World Bank (2002) which states that 40% of the population in Sub Saharan Africa lives on less than \$365 per year therefore is in absolute poverty. However, there was relative increase in household income of people in Caledonia in 2009, when the donor funded agricultural input supply scheme started. Thirty five percent (35%) of the respondents lived between US\$100 and US\$300 in 2009. It was noted that the free input supply scheme assisted more than 50% of the vulnerable households from buying maize seeds and fertilizers. Moreover, the scheme improved yields and people started selling their agricultural produce in the nearby locations of Mabvuku and Tafara in Harare. Household incomes were

noted to have increased after the scheme. Thirty three percent (33%) of the respondents highlighted that after the scheme in 2008 their incomes increased and now living on above US\$300 per year. Though the scheme improved the household income, results indicated that 67% of the households are still living on less than US\$365 per year, which is an indication that there is still high rate of poverty in the community.

### 3.2.4 Access to Livelihood assets

The implementation of the donor funded agricultural input supply scheme enabled households to acquire livelihood assets such as ploughs, scotch carts and cattle. About 45% were barter trading bags of maize with livestock and other assets. Purchasing of livestock was said to have increased the level of production. This was also noted by Lawal et al (2011) that those using machineries in the farm production process had 26.2% lower poverty than those not using farm machineries. Ten percent (10%) of the respondents indicated that they acquired land through the implementation of the scheme. This was also supported by key informant interviews which noted that some of the people in Caledonia had only land to build their houses, without land for farming. Whereas there were pieces of land which were idle in some parts of the area. Therefore the local NGO negotiated with the local government authorities so that the land will be given to those who were landless. Thus, the scheme enabled some community members to acquire land which agrees with the findings of a study by Lawal et al (2011) that those households owning land had 50 percent reduction in poverty than those not owning land. However, the majority of people in Caledonia had no assets acquired through the coming of the scheme, as reflected by forty three percent (43) of the respondents. This shows that the scheme had not improved the physical capital of the majority in Caledonia community.

## 3.3 Vulnerability to poverty

### 3.3.1 Level of Education

The fundamental purpose of education is to gain knowledge, understand the forms of proper conduct and acquire technical competency in specific subject(s) (World Bank, 2001). Education serves as the means to develop oneself physically. Majority of the respondents, (65%) attained primary and secondary education. This implies that most of the beneficiaries are able to interpret the instructions on the seed packs and the fertilizers. The key informants pointed out that those who had attained some education were flexible and could easily understand the trainings offered by the organisations during implementation of the scheme, such as the Conservative Farming method, which helps conservation of the soil moisture and fertility. Ignorance results in resistance to change. Thus, those who are not educated (23%), can face challenges of flexibility to appreciate the methods of farming as required by the scheme. Often those with no education fail to plan their farming activities, and apply fertilizers in the time required which hamper growth of crops. However, it is not always the case that people who did not attain formal education cannot practice conservative methods of farming. Research findings highlighted that some people use the indigenous knowledge systems to conserve soils. Some burn the remains of the maize cobs and maize stems in their fields to improve soil fertility, which improves productivity. Pearson's

correlation coefficient shows that there is a strong positive relationship ( $P > 0.05$ ,  $r$  is 0,690) between education and level of sustainability. This implies that the community should engage in educational activities and projects such as vocational training centers to enhance higher levels of education. The gained knowledge and skills would then be applied to development activities to ensure sustainability.

## 3.4 Poverty indicators

**Table 5:** Caledonia Poverty indicators, N=60

Response	%
High prevalence of diseases and ill health in the community	25
Landlessness	17
Poor infrastructure, roads, and lack of electricity	18
High rate of school drop outs	23
Many socially excluded group	17
Total	100

The majority of the respondents (25%) indicated 'high prevalence of diseases and ill health' as a major indicator of poverty in the community. This creates 'time poverty', where most of the time which was supposed to be spent in the fields is lost taking care of the sick, and human capital is lost where infected people die. This was also noted by IFAD (2001) that financial capital is channeled from the productive sector to the unproductive sector, where money is spent in hospitalization of the sick, hence reduced production. Twenty three percent (23%) mentioned 'high rate of school drop outs', hence loss of social capital. Eighteen percent (18%) stated 'poor infrastructure such as roads, dirty wells for drinking water, and lack of electricity', which indicates high rate of poverty in the area, and 17% highlighted 'landlessness' and 'social exclusion of some groups in the community as some of the indicators of persisting poverty in Caledonia. The findings are in agreement with characteristics and indicators of poverty according to international standards, Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries (SESRTCIC) (2007), which, after a survey of the situation of poverty in Sub-Sahara Africa, noted that in most poor communities the incidence of communicable diseases such as malaria and tuberculosis is also very high in many developing countries. This impact negatively on the Human Development Index (HDI) which is used to measure the quality of people's lives to achieve human development. The index incorporates the following indicators, namely, life expectancy, adult literacy rates, Gross Enrolment Ratio; and GDP per capita (PPP US\$). Thus, with high school drop outs, disease outbreak, low income spent on food, social exclusion of the youths and the disadvantaged and poor infrastructure, the community is ranked as one of the poorest with residents who could not access expected livelihoods assets.

### 3.5 Household land access and tenure security

#### 3.5.1 Land Access and Land Size

Forty two percent (42%) stated that they had access to 'small land'. Seventeen percent (17%) had access to 'average' size land. Thirteen percent (13%) had access to 'large' land whilst 10% had no access. Under 'other' responses category 18% that they had no access to land on their own but were 'renting' land from others who had access. This is complemented with the results from interviews, where the majority pointed out that, although the community has access to land, most of them have relatively small land pieces. Access to land is vital for sustainable livelihoods. This is explained by Farrington (2001), who noted that underlying the sustainable livelihoods approach to poverty alleviation is the theory that people draw on a range of capital assets (livelihoods assets) or poverty reducing factors to further their livelihood objectives. His conclusion was that within this framework, land plays multiple positions and thus, secure access to land can be a livelihood objective. Farrington (2001) further postulated that land is also a natural asset through which other livelihood objectives, such as gender equality and sustainable use of resources, may be achieved. Therefore, land can be a route or opportunity through which a multitude of other assets become accessible. Hence, when there is access to ample land for farming, the donor funded agricultural input supply scheme can boost crop production and attain livelihood sustainability.

#### 3.5.2 Land tenure security

It was noted from the interviews conducted that in Caledonia, land is either state or communally owned. Therefore no citizens own land even if people have full access. This came about as a result of the Fast Track Land Reform (FTLR) that commenced in 2000 (GOZ, 2005). Likewise smallholder farmers in the community do not have title deeds, since it is owned by the local authority, the Goromonzi District Council. This means that the communal farmers face challenges related to security of tenure and this may also hamper the development of long term development projects, considering that the cities of Harare and Ruwa are still growing and may end up taking the land currently being used as plots for farming by Caledonia residents. Apart from the inputs that farmers require, land ownership, access, and tenure security have a direct impact on how the farmers use the land, and the livelihoods that such citizens will attain. This is in line with Whiteside and Carr (1997) who pointed out that, security of tenure is necessary for smallholders to take a long term view and conserve and invest in the land and its natural resources.

### 3.5 Impact of agricultural input scheme on livelihoods.

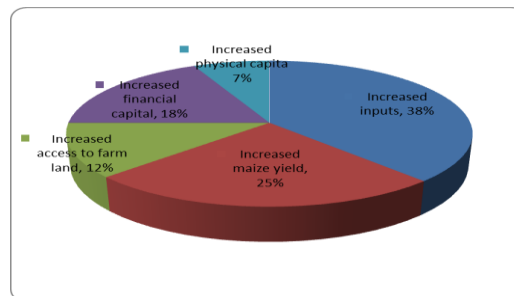


Figure 1 Livelihoods benefits from inputs scheme, N=60

Thirty eight percent (38%) stated that the increased inputs because of the donor funded agricultural input supply scheme was highlighted as a major benefit that the community had experienced since the program started in 2008 (fig 1). However, although the scheme has improved availability of fertilizers and maize seeds, it is catering for the most vulnerable such as child headed families, the elderly, single parents, and the chronically ill, especially the HIV infected. Because of their vulnerability status they fail to boost agriculture production causing the community to remain poor in spite of the donor aid. Increased maize crop production was also highlighted as another benefit of the scheme for the beneficiaries of the input scheme. Despite the noticeable increase, most of the beneficiaries live on hand to mouth and they have large families. Thus, the yields were never enough for household consumption, let alone for sell to improve household income to buy agricultural inputs for the following season. Access and ownership to natural capital (land, water, pasture, and biodiversity), financial capital (income and savings, access to credit livestock) and physical capital (improved roads, irrigation, electricity, and housing) were also said to have been facilitated by the scheme.

### 3.7 Challenges of the agriculture input supply scheme in improving livelihoods

Table 6: Challenges of free NGOs inputs to improving farmers livelihoods, N=60

Response	%
The scheme covers very few Caledonia residents	28.3
The scheme only supports maize production which has poor market price and leaves out other cash crops	23.3
The scheme creates donor dependence syndrome	26.6
NGOs not consulting or work with local ARES officers	13.3
Landlessness	8.3
Total	100

Table 6 reflects that majority of the community residents are not benefiting from the scheme, and only a few had improved yields. It was also highlighted that the scheme only supports maize production which has poor market price and leaves out other cash crops. This was in line agreement with Khan (2001) who noted that NGOs' small size means that their projects rarely address the structural factors underlying rural poverty, such as creating an integrated approach which includes various activities that promotes rural development. Though the maize yields have improved people do not have market, and the prices are very low of around US\$3 per bucket, hence to noticeable increase in income, many buckets of maize are needed. The scheme has also created donor dependence syndrome. The community is now used to free inputs and most of them are said to be reluctant to prepare for the rain season waiting for the donor supplies. This contradicts with the NGO Code of Conduct which states that, NGOs shall endeavor to minimize the negative impact of humanitarian assistance, seeking to avoid long-term beneficiary dependence upon external aid (The Sphere Project, 2004). Respondents also highlighted that NGOs do not consult or work with local AREX officers. This supports the argument made by Aliyu (2002) that, small size, independence and differences in philosophy of NGOs and other organizations militates against learning from each other's experience, and against the creation of effective forums, whether at national or provincial levels. Though the scheme might be beneficiary to the community, it was highlighted that very few are participating because some are landless in the same community (8%) and very few are participating in the program.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This article concludes that access to large piece of land and having access or possession of agricultural inputs such as fertilizers and maize seeds as well as draught power (cattle and a plough) are vital livelihoods assets of which the majority of the Caledonia households do not have. Despite being a beneficiary of free agricultural input scheme since 2008 the community is still poor with residents subject to malnutrition and high prevalence of communicable diseases and ill health' as well as high rate of school drops. It is further concluded that Caledonia community is still vulnerable to poverty with majority of the residents indicating that there were 'low' prospects that their households could live above poverty line in the near future and that they were not capable to recover from shocks such as droughts' on their own without assistance from NGOs or Government handouts. The study also concluded that the majority of small holder farmers in Caledonia had access to small pieces of land without tenure security, finding it difficult to embark on long term projects to break poverty traps. Only a small number of households of more vulnerable groups (the elderly, child-headed families and other disadvantaged households) benefited from the programme, and as a result the input scheme could not have a broader positive impact on livelihoods. Focusing on maize production only meant that other cash crops like tobacco were left out and thus, the beneficiaries remain dependent on the free supply of maize seeds and fertilizers and are defenseless to shocks such as droughts. One can also note that free agricultural scheme failed to achieve sustainable community livelihoods such as empowering residents to operate on their own, generate their revenue, and have access to capital assets such as credit facilities so that they could alleviate poverty. With the

challenges and the scenario in Caledonia community, it can be noted that the donor funded agricultural input scheme is failing to sustain rural livelihoods. Basing on the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (SLA), the paper recommends that the donor community should adapt a strategy that targets both the disadvantaged members and the majority small-holder farmers in order to achieve broadly community-shared benefits. There is need to reduce vulnerability and empower rural communities through facilitating the accessibility of livelihoods assets, not just providing a short-term relief to poverty challenges.

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