

A young boy with dark skin and short hair is sitting in a field. He is wearing a light green shirt and a dark green vest. He is holding a large, woven basket filled with orange and yellow fruits, possibly pumpkins or squash. The background is a blurred field with some trees in the distance.

Enhancing food security through the empowerment of schools

A United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security (UNTFHS) funded project implemented by UNICEF and FAO in the Bullilima, Mangwe, Binga, Zaka, and Hwange districts of Zimbabwe



BACKGROUND

The Zimbabwean economy is agriculture based, providing livelihoods to over 70 per cent of the population. Formerly a net exporter of food, since 2002, Zimbabwe has received food aid to address severe food insecurity arising from a combination of factors including consecutive years of drought, weakened institutional capacities to respond to food insecurity, and a decline of investment in basic social services. Moreover, due to a high prevalence rate of HIV/AIDS, the intergenerational transfer of agricultural knowledge and other basic life skills passed on from parents to children have been severely disrupted. As a result, food insecurity, poor nutrition and health status as well as weakened capacity to manage natural resources and the environment have rendered many children highly vulnerable.

To tackle the complex food, nutrition, and health insecurity situation, UNICEF and FAO jointly developed the UNTFHS-funded project to improve food security and the management of natural resources and the environment through basic education. The project sought to: (i) enhance the relevance and quality of education for 20,000 rural children through participatory garden-based learning sites where practical skills in environmental science, agriculture, nutrition, health, hygiene, knowledge and life skills could be developed; (ii) improve food security and dietary habits among 20,000 school children and their families in 50 schools by improving agricultural production and food preparation skills; and (iii) improve the coping capacities of 12,000 care-giving families and community organizations supporting orphans and other vulnerable children.



The story of Honest Matenda

For Honest Matenda, a 13 year old student at the Chinorumba Primary School, the new garden and curriculum has provided more than simply a new subject in school. He explains that since he lives in a rural area, jobs are scarce and most families depend on agriculture to provide both food and income for their families.

“I am very happy for the training and the skills I am getting in the classroom and in the garden”, he comments when discussing the project’s dual approach. It combines classroom curriculum on nutrition, health and hygiene, with a hands-on, participatory method in garden training.

He lifts his hand up, points to the garden bed and explains: “There we are developing lettuce, broccoli, peas; there it is green pepper, okra, eggplant, tree tomato; and there are different herbs!”


With a proud grin on his face, he emphasizes that “I am making a kitchen garden at home already”. With support from the school’s garden master and community volunteers, students are being encouraged to bring their newly acquired skills into their homes.



Credit: UNICEF/FAO



In total, 450 teachers were trained on participatory methods, environmental education and agricultural skills as well as nutrition, water and hygiene practices. In addition, teachers received specific trainings geared towards sustainable management of 'nutrition gardens'. With this newly acquired knowledge, teachers were able to improve curriculum on sustainable and environmentally-sound agricultural practices as well as key health, nutrition and hygiene skills.

A group of people, including children and adults, are standing outdoors in a rural setting, possibly a garden or field. The image is somewhat blurry and has a low resolution. The people are dressed in casual clothing. The background shows some greenery and a dirt path.

By the end of the project, all 50 nutrition gardens were fully operational. Through the activities of the project, more than 20,000 rural children and their families had access to quality food products and knowledge on how best to manage food production and processing in the future. Moreover, due to the participation of parents in the Healthy Harvest Course, the benefits of improved agricultural practices and proper nutrition had spread to the broader community.



Photo provided by Iwaki Taku

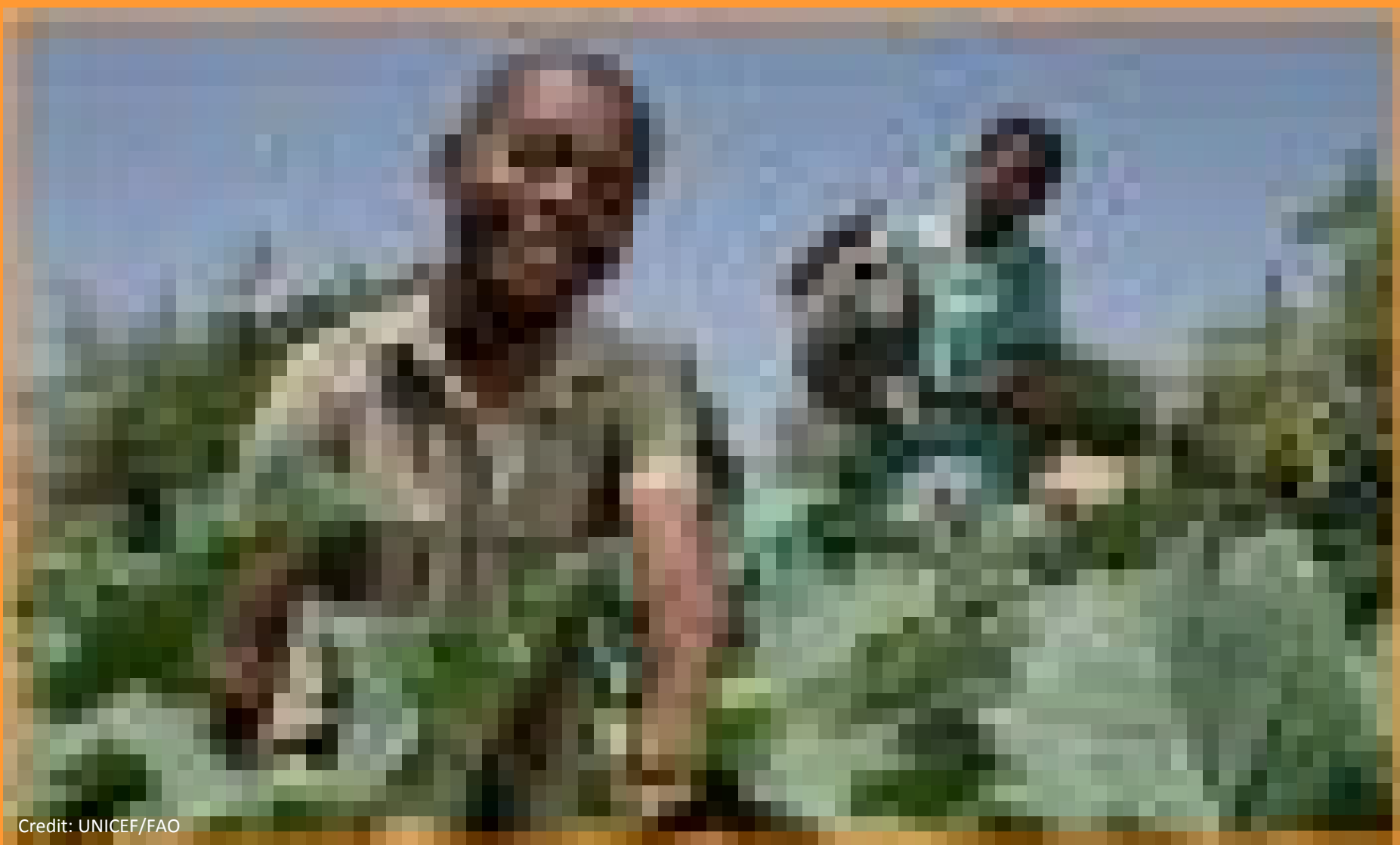
A major challenge Zimbabwean schools face is the lack of parent and community involvement in children's education. To foster collaboration and ensure the long-term sustainability of the school gardens programme, School Development Committees (SDCs) were established in all 50 schools. The SDCs brought together Government officials, teachers, parents and community members to participate in the development of garden plans.

Njerabani Augustine was appointed Chairperson of the SDC at Chinorumba Primary School. "I am very happy about strengthening the relationship between the school and the community after the garden project was started", Mr. Augustine states.

"When the project team came and assisted the school, the community also assisted by volunteering to reinforce the garden fence, ploughing and planting field crops with their children".

The school garden now acts as a hub, a meeting place for many of the community members. Teachers appreciate the new found interest from parents because it gives them an opportunity to dialogue, which leads to increased involvement in their children's education.

Mr. Augustine seems certain that the project will have a positive impact on all the children in the community. With several families lacking the resources to pay school fees, he seeks to expand the garden area and sell the produce to cover the cost of education for these children.



Credit: UNICEF/FAO

The United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security (UNTFHS) has funded more than 200 projects in over 80 countries around the world.

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