

ENSURE DFAP Final Performance Evaluation

Summary Brief

INTRODUCTION

The Enhancing Nutrition, Stepping up Resiliency and Enterprise (ENSURE) Development Food Assistance Project (DFAP) aimed to reduce food insecurity in Zimbabwe through three strategic objectives (SOs) and one cross-cutting priority:

- Undernutrition is prevented among women of reproductive age and children under five years of age
- Household income increased
- Resilience to food insecurity of communities improved
- Cross-cutting priority: Promoting gender-equitable decision-making

This brief summarizes the results of the final evaluation conducted by [TANGO International](#). The evaluation measured ENSURE's development outcomes and presents evidence that:

- The integrated nature of interventions/messages across SOs created a supportive environment for behavior change
- Social capital was strengthened as people worked in groups to implement activities
- The integration of gender across program activities helped create a safe environment for men and women to examine traditional attitudes
- Community asset sites were launching points for other activities and provided safe zones for community interaction, knowledge sharing, and learning
- Village Savings and Lending (VS&L) groups can serve as a core integrating activity for other project activities



Photo Credit: Jeanne Downen

ABOUT ENSURE

Primary Focus Areas: 1) Undernutrition, especially for children under five and pregnant and lactating women, 2) Agriculture production, marketing, and non-farm income, 3) Water, hygiene, and sanitation; 4) Natural resource and environment management; 5) Disaster risk mitigation and community capacity strengthening; and 6) Gender equity

Implementing Organizations: World Vision, CARE, Foundation of Netherlands Volunteers, Southern Alliance for Indigenous Resources, and the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics

Funding Source: United States Agency for International Development, Office of Food for Peace (FFP)

Implementation Period: FY 2014 – FY 2019 (with cost extension to 2020)

Intervention Areas: 66 wards in six districts of Manicaland and Masvingo provinces



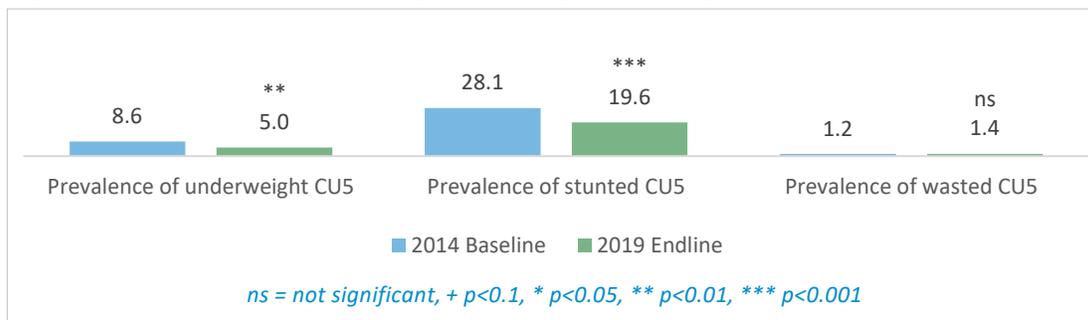
KEY FINDINGS

Nutrition among Women of Reproductive Age and Children under Five Improved (S01)

Women’s and children’s health showed improvement in some critical areas. The endline population-based survey (PBS) data show significant decreases between baseline and endline in the prevalence of underweight and stunted children (Figure 1). Among women, exclusive breastfeeding for children under six months increased by 24.7 percentage points from baseline to 60.5 percent at endline. Almost half of pregnant women had their first antenatal care visit within the first four months of pregnancy, a significant improvement from baseline. The prevalence of underweight women decreased slightly, and child wasting remained low. These results are especially positive considering the difficult economic and environmental conditions during the life of the project. Still, there were indications at population level of persistent problems in securing an adequate diet, as the percent of children under two (CU2) with a minimum acceptable diet or a diverse diet did not change. Providing children with a diversified diet was difficult as some foods became very expensive and mothers had to divert time from childcare to casual labor in order to earn income.

While the PBS data showed the nutrition challenges at the population level, qualitative interviews indicated that the health and nutrition of mothers and CU2 participating in ENSURE improved and that many households were able to purchase more nutritious foods with income from VS&L groups and small enterprise activities. ENSURE participants credited the Care Groups for their increased nutrition knowledge and practices, in part because the groups reached out to key decision-makers in the family (men, grandmothers, and mothers-in-law). The Care Group model faced challenges with inadequate supervision of Care Group sessions, limited availability of government health staff, and sharing rations targeted to CU2 with other children in the household. To address these challenges and help ensure that gains are sustainable, the project engaged closely with the Ministry of Health and Child Care (MoHCC) in the training and support of Care Groups, which the MoHCC plans to expand to non-ENSURE wards. The MoHCC’s adoption of the Care Group model is also

Figure 1: Prevalence of underweight, stunting, or wasting of CU5 at baseline and endline

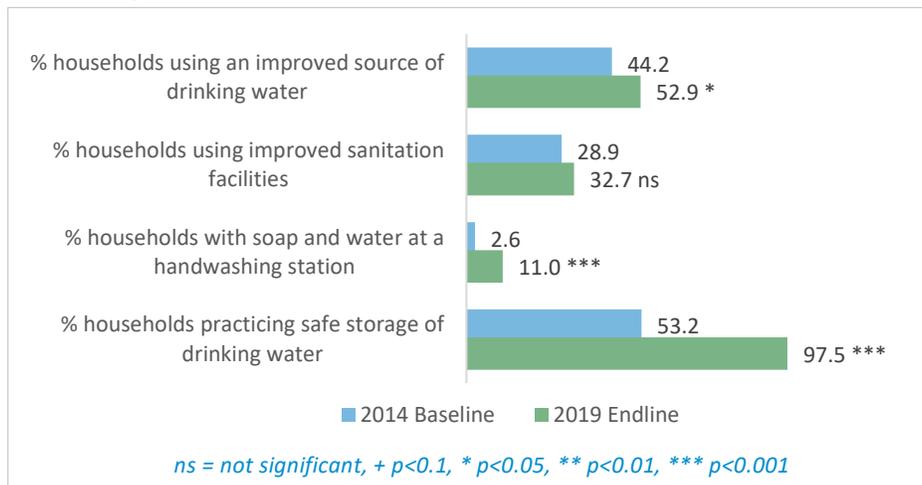


expected to help retain community volunteers, as volunteers will continue to have support from nurses and health centers after the project ends.

Water, hygiene, and sanitation (WASH) activities were designed to support improved health and nutrition. Community Health Clubs played a key role by helping community members identify, analyze, and improve health behaviors. Four of the six basic WASH practices promoted by ENSURE showed improvement, with the largest gain in the safe storage of drinking water (Figure 2). Although the PBS showed no change in the percentage of households using improved sanitation facilities, the qualitative evaluation team observed good hygiene practices and many well-constructed latrines built under ENSURE. Community water management

groups are ensuring that water points function though many communities did not obtain access to safe water as planned, as the project was unable to obtain official permission to blast for boreholes.

Figure 2: ENSURE WASH indicators at baseline and endline

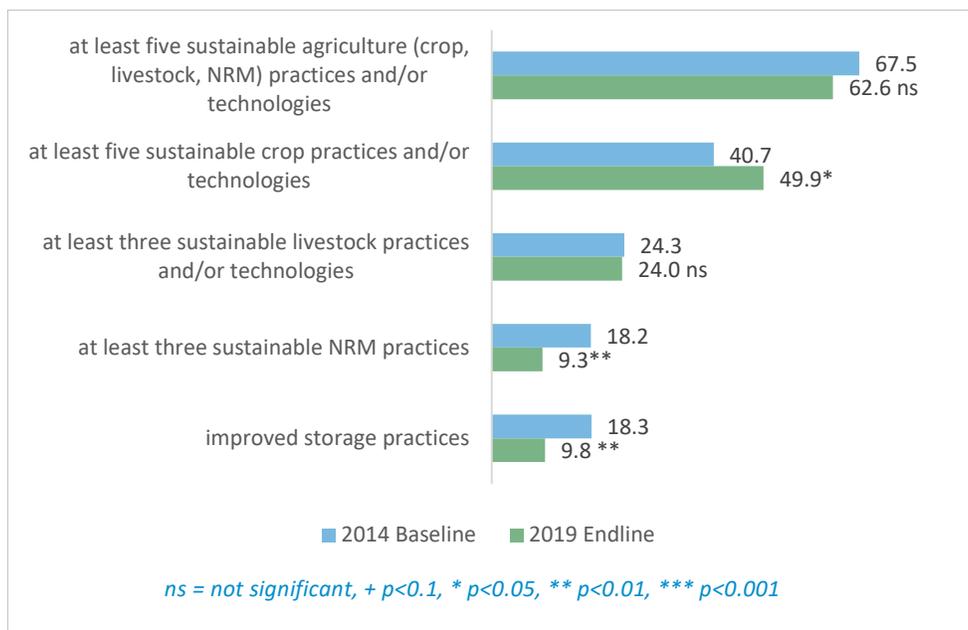


Household Income Increased (S02)

The PBS results for income indicators reflect the economic and environmental hardships in Zimbabwe over the 2014-2019 implementation period of the project, such as successive years of drought, economic instability, and a devastating cyclone. The PBS data show that, between baseline and endline, there was no change in poverty prevalence, per capita daily expenditures decreased, and most households in the survey area were further below the national poverty line than they were at the start of the project.

Despite the contextual challenges, half of all farmers had adopted sustainable crop practices and/or technologies promoted by ENSURE (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Percentage of farmers using sustainable agriculture (crop, livestock, NRM) practices in the 12 months prior to the baseline and to the endline



ENSURE's project monitoring data show strong achievement in the adoption of nearly all improved practices and technologies among participants, though natural resource management (NRM) and improved storage practices decreased. By contrast, PBS data show that, while over three-quarters of all farmers were engaged in one or more value chains, there was no change in the percentage of farmers who practiced value chain activities promoted by ENSURE, indicating that there was no broader uptake by non-participant farmers. This could be due to successive disasters and dramatically reduced harvests that shifted farmers' focus away from production to recovery. Few farmers had sufficient harvests at endline to warrant storing seeds nor did they have time to engage in NRM practices.

While most agricultural indicators showed no change at the population level, ENSURE participants stated that the project helped to increase the availability of nutritious foods that included animal-sourced protein and helped households to earn and save more, which improved their ability to purchase larger quantities of higher quality food. Farmers were also producing vegetables and fruits in protected garden sites that were irrigated by dams constructed with Food for Assets (FFA). The garden produce was used to improve household nutrition, especially for children, reflecting effective integration of ENSURE activities.

ENSURE promoted five value chains (sorghum, beans, groundnuts, indigenous poultry, and goats) centered on the formation of producer and marketing groups, and supported sustainability by linking communities to private-sector buyers and services. The sorghum value chain activity, linked with the World Food Programme's pilot Purchase for Progress initiative, was particularly successful in improving production and increasing sales. Farmers also successfully adopted a new variety of bio-fortified beans and secured a large national food company as a dedicated buyer. Women credited their participation in poultry and goat value chains with a significant increase in their income. Most poultry producer groups had reliable markets, though goat production was hampered by limited market access and a lack of capital to build sustainable herds. To complement increased production, ENSURE facilitated expanded access to market information. Although price volatility and poor infrastructure remain problematic, farmers are in touch with their new markets through information platforms such as WhatsApp. Government agriculture extension service officers have been closely involved in supporting farmers and market links, though limited government resources make their sustained assistance to ENSURE communities uncertain. When persistent drought required farmers to seek income outside of the promoted value chains, ENSURE expanded its market systems approach in order to help people diversify into non-farm enterprises.

The VS&L component of ENSURE is highly successful and members have used their savings to provide financial support to activities in all three SOs. Over one-quarter of farmers were using financial services by the endline, up from 14.2 percent at baseline. The percentage of female farmers using financial services increased, reflecting ENSURE's focus on women in value chain and other income activities. However, the VS&L groups face major challenges as hyperinflation erodes the value of their savings, and most groups reported changing practices to preserve value, such as converting their cash to material goods or to foreign currencies.

Resilience to Food Insecurity of Communities Improved (SO3)

The PBS results show that food insecurity intensified and the prevalence of moderate to severe hunger increased, consistent with the increasing hardships in Zimbabwe. Nevertheless, most ENSURE respondents in the qualitative study said that they are more food secure now, despite the shocks, especially those households with access to irrigated community gardens and water for livestock. Farmers said that due to drought they harvested only about half of their normal production, but before ENSURE they would have harvested nothing.

As part of its resilience strategy, ENSURE supported the organization of community-based committees that increased community capacity to identify, anticipate, and mitigate risks, manage their natural resource base,

and improve food security. Community assets were built or rehabilitated using FFA and specifically included the most vulnerable households. The reactivation and strengthening of community-based Disaster Management Committees was successful in raising awareness and fostering community ownership of disaster management. The committees demonstrated their value by disseminating early warning messages in advance of Cyclone Idai in 2019, and by assisting government civil protection workers after the disaster. Women’s access to early warning information improved, and while remote communities still face communication problems, they now have access to digital platforms for more timely information.

The management of community assets was strengthened through the organization of community-level committees to manage natural resources, local watersheds, and dams. The dams are substantial structures, and while communities contribute to maintenance, they need strong links to and additional support from government to ensure sustainability, particularly to meet the cost of major repairs.

Gender

PBS results show a decrease in FFP indicators for women’s adequacy around asset ownership, decisions on credit, and decisions about assets. Men’s adequacy also decreased for the first two indicators. This is likely a result of daunting economic and environmental challenges as well as traditional barriers to asset ownership and credit for women. By contrast, ENSURE participants reported that the promotion of gender equity, the creation of VS&Ls and income-generating activities for women, and the inclusion of women in community decision-making committees created a powerful platform for women’s active participation in their communities and greater equity, labor-sharing, and harmony at the household level. The early engagement of community leaders and elders was key to reducing barriers to changing gender roles.

RECOMMENDATIONS



Integration of Activities

- **Maximize integration of program activities to enhance health, nutrition, and livelihood gains and strengthen community resilience.** Future programs that use multi-sector interventions to improve food security and income should emphasize integration and complementarity to amplify and strengthen the impact of any one intervention.



Maternal and Child Health and Nutrition

- **Ensure that the Care Group model is adequately supported and supervised.** As the MoHCC adopts and expands the Care Group model, USAID could support the adoption of this model in Zimbabwe and elsewhere by promoting approaches that provide rigorous evidence on: i) the impact of the Care Group model on maternal and child health outcomes; ii) the cost-benefit of the Care Group model compared to other care models; iii) innovative approaches for enhancing adolescent and young mother participation; iv) how mobile health applications can be used to enhance the effectiveness of the Care Group model; and v) how to ensure the effectiveness of these dimensions of cascade models. In addition, high-quality supervision and ensuring messages are not diluted are key to effectiveness in a cascade model.



Research to Inform Behavior Change

- **Use formative research to inform social behavior change communication (SBCC) interventions.** SBCC interventions should apply a holistic approach, using communications to motivate change along with other project activities to influence behaviors, as ENSURE did effectively with infant and young child feeding practices. Use formative research to inform SBCC interventions addressing the social norms that influence health and nutrition practices such as dietary choices.



Linking with Government for Sustainability

- **Link community-based committees to government agencies.** Asset Management Committees (AMCs) are important to the sustainability of new assets but need additional support in management, maintenance, and financing. Stronger linkages should be facilitated between AMCs and government technical services to strengthen the AMCs' sustainability and their ability to pay for asset maintenance.



Flexibility

- **Use a responsive and flexible approach to adapt to contextual changes.** In Zimbabwe's dynamic environment, projects should continually monitor contextual factors and engage in dialogue with communities to inform adaptive programming and to be responsive to participants' ideas and needs.



Monitoring and Evaluation

- **Design M&E systems to better capture impact.** The disparity between the population-based results and annual beneficiary-based results suggests that project impact may be better captured at the participant level. Although more expensive, an impact evaluation provides the best measure of results that can be attributed to the program.



Timeframe

- **Make longer-term, well-timed investments.** The five-year timeframe of DFAPs is often not long enough to realize sustained progress, or to capture it quantitatively, especially when external events such as natural disasters or macro-economic shocks affect project outcomes. USAID should continue to invest in ENSURE program areas to strengthen the sustainable impact of its investments to date.

MIXED-METHODS METHODOLOGY

- Population-based survey (PBS) (May - June 2019)
 - 1,360 households in the six ENSURE districts
- Quantitative analysis compared baseline and endline indicators
- Qualitative study (four project districts) (Aug – Sep 2019)
 - 46 focus group discussions (355 F, 143 M)
 - 80 key informant interviews (35 F, 45 M)
 - Observations of infrastructure assets built or rehabilitated with project support
- Review of project documents, project monitoring data and secondary sources