



Summary Evaluation Report

Decentralized evaluation for evidence-based decision making

Evaluation of R4 Rural Resilience Initiative in Masvingo and Rushinga Districts in Zimbabwe (January 2018 – June 2021)

INTRODUCTION

This summary evaluation report presents key findings and recommendations from the decentralized evaluation of the R4 Rural Resilience Initiative in Zimbabwe. The evaluation was commissioned by the WFP Zimbabwe Country Office (CO) and was conducted by the Particip (lead company) and Jimat consortium. The evaluation covered the first phase of R4 from January 2018 to June 2021 and data collection took place from 20th September to 1st October 2021.

THE SUBJECT OF THE EVALUATION

The R4 initiative involved a package of activities for managing climate-related risks organized under four synergistic themes (risk reduction, risk transfer, risk reserve formation, and promotion of prudent risk-taking). R4 combines the four strategies into an integrated risk management (IRM) approach that builds resilience more comprehensively and efficiently than the individual implementation of each would do. The R4 covered eight wards in the Masvingo district (which joined the initiative between 2018 and 2020) and four wards in the Rushinga district (since 2020). By the end of the first phase in June 2021, R4 had enrolled 6,000 beneficiaries. The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) funded the first phase of the R4 initiative (US\$ 2.66 million).

OBJECTIVES OF THE EVALUATION

The evaluation served the dual purpose of learning and accountability (with more weight given to learning) and aimed to produce new evidence for operational and strategic decision-making. The evaluation was timed to inform the second phase of the R4 Initiative and the resilience building programming approach to be adopted in the 2021-2025 Country Strategic Plan. The evaluation also sought to reduce existing evidence gaps in the studies on the R4 Initiative in Zimbabwe conducted prior to the final evaluation.

STAKEHOLDERS & USERS OF THE EVALUATION

The primary users of the evaluation findings comprise:

- WFP CO and its partners: for decision-making on IRM approaches, country strategy, and partnerships.
- WFP Regional Bureau (RB) for Southern Africa: for strategic guidance, programme support, and oversight.

- WFP Headquarters (HQ): for wider organizational learning and accountability, and the Office of Evaluation for corporate learning and annual reporting.
- SDC: to understand the extent to which the R4 Initiative met its objectives, the key challenges it faced, and to obtain lessons and good practices for future support.

METHODS

The evaluation adopted a theory-based, mixed-methods approach in primary data collection and review of existing information. The evaluation also used a 'light' contribution analysis approach. The evaluation sought to respond to the overarching evaluation question on *"the extent to which the R4 initiative, as part of the integrated risk management interventions, was effective in enhancing food security and building the resilience of beneficiary households and communities."* In addition, the evaluation answered seven high-level evaluation questions (EQs) related to relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability.

LIMITATIONS

The international evaluation team (ET) members could not travel to Zimbabwe due to Covid-19 restrictions and this reduced the volume, depth, and triangulation of primary data. This was partially mitigated by using existing studies and data, remote interviews, and the phone survey.

The availability of baseline and control group data was another limitation. For instance, the control group data for Masvingo district only comprised one ward. Neither the validity of the control group nor the statistical significance of observed differences in programme and control group outcome data could be rigorously tested with the available data. In addition, outcome monitoring results did not allow for testing the statistical significance of observed gender differences. To mitigate this, outcome monitoring survey data was intensively used in EQs 3 (effectiveness) and 6 (impact), although not for rigorous attribution analysis. To mitigate the attribution issue, the analysis complemented the outcome monitoring data in a contribution analysis with contextual information, data from focus group discussions (FGDs), progress reports, and other R4 studies.

Reference:

Full evaluation reports and the Management Response are available at <https://www.wfp.org/publications/zimbabwe-r4-rural-resilience-initiative-masvingo-and-rushinga-evaluation>
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KEY FINDINGS

Below is a summary of the key evaluation findings according to evaluation criteria.

RELEVANCE

The selection of R4 sites was based on an Integrated Context Analysis (ICA) which identified Masvingo and Rushinga as districts that received insufficient rainfall for maize production and were characterized by high levels of food insecurity. This was due to poor water availability, low agricultural productivity (due to insufficient or excess rain), livestock mortality, poor market access, and insufficient access to credit, which can only be addressed through integrated approaches.

At the sub-district level, Seasonal Livelihood Programming (SLP) was carried out to assess the operating context and map stakeholders. SLP was complemented by the Community Based Participatory Planning (CBPP) process. **Beneficiaries in both project sites were unanimous in their view that the CBPP process was effective in engaging a wide range of stakeholders**, including women and vulnerable people, in identifying an integrated package of assets and activities relevant to addressing the challenges they faced. Overall beneficiaries understood the logic of R4, the relevance of activities, and the integrated and sequential nature of the outputs to their livelihoods.

Beneficiaries reported that the assets created were useful for protection against extreme weather events and for enhancing food security. However, they held a notion that the Food Assistance for Assets (FFA) transfer should cover the entirety of their food needs rather than compliment them.

The R4 **risk reduction** pillar on the promotion of small grains production using mechanized conservation agriculture (CA) as an alternative to maize production was **relevant to the agro-ecological conditions and addressed labour constraints related to CA.** Over 90 percent of surveyed households reported that the techniques learned under risk reduction improved their yields and reduced post-harvest losses, demonstrating a high degree of relevance to the context. Furthermore, **WFP provided market linkages to prospective buyers, thus making small grains more appealing to the farmers.**

While the evaluation found that **risk transfer** through index-based insurance was in principle relevant, farmers highlighted two factors that reduced the utility of crop insurance, that is, (i) maize was not covered, and (ii) crops were only insured against drought, but not excess rain

although the latter issue has now been addressed. **Stakeholders, farmers, and insurers expressed concerns about crop insurance covering small grains rather than maize**, despite maize being Zimbabwe's staple food which also serves as the main instrument for barter and method of exchange given the country's economic situation.

Although the provision of **crop insurance** was relevant for the transfer of climatic risk, it was not identified by farmers as a need at the CBPP stage. Farmers could not completely understand that insurance premiums would rise due to the risk of cultivating maize in Masvingo, particularly in Rushinga. In addition, farmers did not comprehend how insurance premiums were triggered and paid out. They anticipated receiving their payouts within a month of the trigger rather than within a month of the closure of the policy. Furthermore, many farmers did not understand how payouts were calculated, and some expected to be paid in United States (US) dollars instead of Zimbabwean dollars since the insurance was pegged in US dollars. Therefore, **more work is required to ensure farmers fully understand how the insurance works since the product was new to them.**

The third and fourth pillars of R4 namely '**risk reserves**' and '**prudent risk taking**' which were addressed through the Village Savings and Loan (VSL) groups were found relevant to beneficiaries, particularly women who constituted most of the membership. The VSL helped them save money, identify, and finance viable business opportunities.

Gender considerations through the establishment of crèches at FFA work sites to enable women to participate in the construction of assets that aimed to reduce the burden of collecting water (dams) and firewood (fuel-saving stoves) were relevant to women, both in terms of saving them labour and promoting their ability to participate.

The evaluation team found a **high degree of alignment between R4's objectives and those of government policies** such as the:-

- Zimbabwe Agenda for Sustainable Socio-Economic Transformation (ZimASSET)
- Food and Nutrition Security Policy
- Zimbabwe Zero Hunger Strategy (2015)
- National Social Protection Policy Framework (2016)
- National Development Strategy (2021-2025)

R4 also aligned with and supported the **UN's 'Delivering as One approach** articulated in the Zimbabwe United Nations Development Assistance Framework (ZUNDAF). ZUNDAF, in turn, supported Zimbabwe's overarching development strategy, ZimASSET, which places a major emphasis on building resilience to climate change. R4 was also fully

Reference:

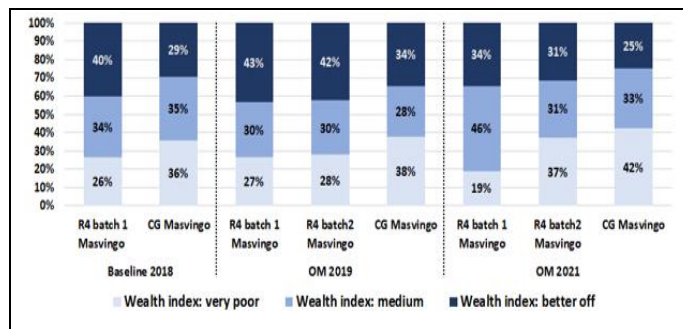
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aligned with the objectives of the SDC Regional Cooperation Strategy for Southern Africa, which acknowledges that Southern Africa is vulnerable to recurring climate-change-induced hazards.

EFFECTIVENESS

The phone surveys revealed a strong perception that FFA improved and diversified household income (Outcome 1). This was validated by the WFP outcome monitoring data (Figure 1), which showed that the proportion of households from the first batch in Masvingo who were categorized as very poor fell from 26 percent in 2018 to 19 percent in 2021. However, most households who joined the programme in 2019 were rated as very poor in 2021 than they were when they joined, most likely due to the uncertain economic and climatic conditions and the COVID-19 pandemic.

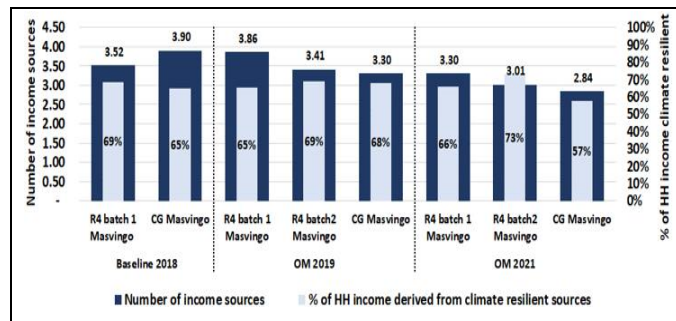
Figure 1: Change in wealth categories (Source: Zimbabwe R4 Evaluation Report, Page 20)



According to WFP outcome monitoring data, R4 appeared to have been unable to increase the number of income sources, with households that joined the project in 2018 having an average of 3.3 livelihood sources in 2021 compared to 3.5 in 2018 (Figure 2). The decrease was more distinct in the control group (3.90 in 2018 and 2.84 in 2021), suggesting that participation in the project may have delayed the level of decline over two difficult years. The share of income obtained from climate-resilient sources varied throughout the project duration, remaining between 65 and 68 percent. Perceptual data collected by the ET depicted a more positive picture, a high proportion of

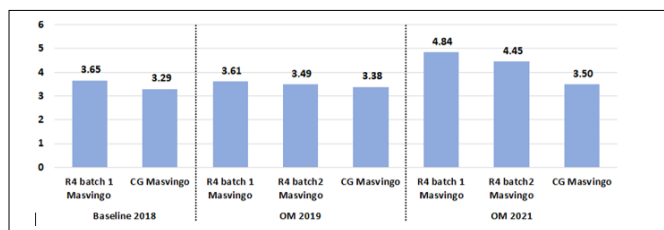
respondents asserting that the project had improved income-generating opportunities.

Figure 2: Number of income sources and share of income from climate-resilient sources (Source: Zimbabwe R4 Evaluation Report, page 20)



R4 achieved very high levels of coverage on training that aimed to increase agricultural production and diversification (Outcome 2). Over 98 percent of beneficiaries reported that they received training on soil fertility management and compost making. Similarly, several people reported that they attended training on livestock management, post-harvest crop handling, and storage. This resulted in a significant increase in crop diversity for batch 1 and 2 farmers, with the average number of crops grown increasing from 3.7 in 2018 to 4.8 in 2021 for batch 1 farmers, and from 3.5 to 4.5 for batch 2 farmers (Figure 3). Both men and women farmers recognized the increases. In 2018 Masvingo batch 1 men farmers cultivated an average of 3.5 crops, while women farmers grew an average of 3 crops. By 2021, the average number of crops increased to 4.8 for both men and women farmers, narrowing the gender disparity in crop diversification.

Figure 3: Average number of crops grown (Source: Zimbabwe R4 Evaluation Report, page 21)



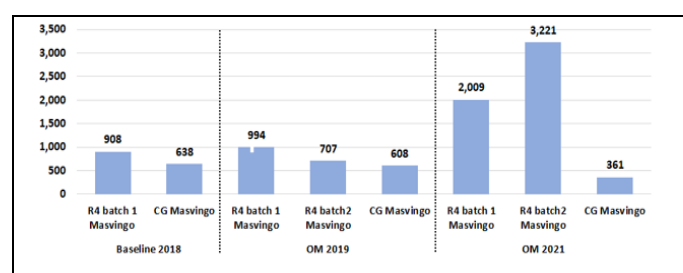
The 2020/2021 cropping season was viewed as extremely favourable, with above-normal rainfall across the country. Maize production for the season was estimated to be 2.7 million metric tons (triple the 2019/2020 total), and traditional grains production was estimated at 0.35 million metric tons, more than double that of the previous year. The Government credited CA, including its Pfumvudza programme for the increased production from 1.2 tons per hectare to 5.3 tons per hectare.

Reference:

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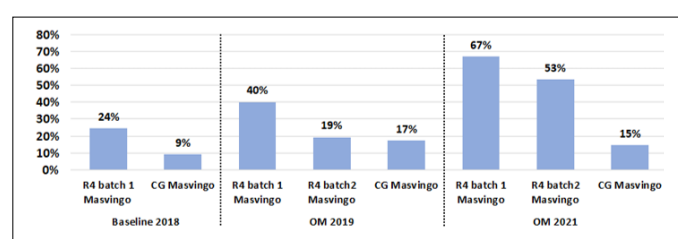
WFP data for beneficiary households reflected impressive production increases. Masvingo **batches 1 and 2 participants more than doubled their 2019-2020 production (Figure 4)**. Women farmers were significantly more productive than men farmers, with batch 1 Masvingo men having an overall production of 1,179 kg in 2021, compared to 3,204 kg for women. This finding could be related to higher levels of project engagement by women farmers. However, this calls for further investigation by WFP because the finding is contrary to the regular pattern of men farmers outperforming women in crop production.

Figure 4: Average annual crop production (kg) (Source: Zimbabwe R4 Evaluation Report, page 22)



Data provided by WFP on **Outcome 3 (improved investment capacity by accessing financial services)** – specifically, the proportion of households who saved money is depicted in *Figure 5* below. **The percentage of batch 1 Masvingo households who saved money increased by roughly 20 percent each year as the project progressed, demonstrating the benefit of VSLs.** The usefulness of VSL groups was highlighted in phone surveys, including a high level of satisfaction with the VSL training, and farming as a business. The survey revealed that **only 29 percent of the beneficiaries invested the loans they received** (or would invest once they receive a loan) in agricultural business.

Figure 5: Percentage of households who save (Source: Zimbabwe R4 Evaluation Report, page 22)

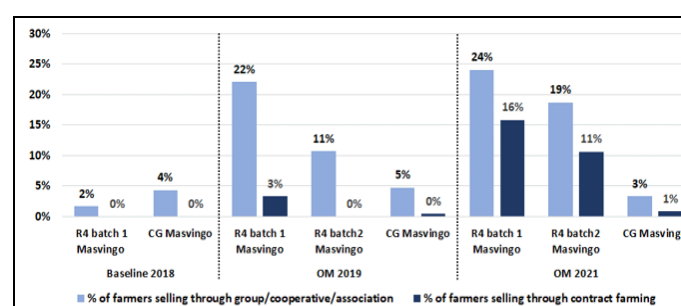


The insurance training was rated less useful than the other courses. However, the provision of insurance (Output 3.4) went according to plan. WFP records showed that, in 2019, index-linked insurance worth US\$ 165,000 was offered to 1,651 participants in four wards in Masvingo, and by the end of the first phase 5,984 of the 6,000 targeted farmers were registered for insurance.

Increasing beneficiaries' access to markets (Outcome 4) was attempted by providing training on post-harvest

handling and business skills and organizing beneficiaries into Producer Marketing Groups (PMGs). R4 was able to increase the number of farmers selling through PMGs and/or contract farming (*Figure 6*). The proportion of Masvingo **batch 1 beneficiaries reporting sales through PMGs increased from 2 percent at baseline, to 22 percent in 2019 and 24 percent in 2021**. Contract farming arrangements also increased significantly year after year. However, it was likely that higher sales in 2021 would have happened without R4 due to increased levels of production following good rainfall in the 2020/2021 season.

Figure 6: Percentage of farmers who sell through Producer Marketing Groups and contract farming (Source: Zimbabwe R4 Evaluation Report, page 23)



Although half of the beneficiaries ($N = 384$) reported that they were a member of a PMG, membership did not translate into concrete benefits. The main benefit of the membership was better knowledge of the market with 51 percent reporting that their knowledge had improved. A quarter of PMGs did not sell any produce, and two-thirds of sales made were to local markets rather than commercial off-takers. PMG membership resulted in higher prices for 16 percent of the respondents ($N=197$), and it enabled higher sales volumes for 28 percent of the respondents.

Improving beneficiaries' capacity for the management of natural resources and climate shocks (Outcome 5) was largely done through the construction of assets meant to increase resilience and provide income opportunities, and conservation agriculture. Beneficiaries expressed high levels of satisfaction with the value of information in improving resilience and food security, and income. The phone survey and FGDs found high levels of participation in and satisfaction with training on soil management, nutrition gardens, and good agricultural practices. WFP outcome monitoring data revealed that CA techniques were widely practiced by both beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries, owing to the Government's promotion of *Pfumvudza* in recent years.

The most notable **unintended positive outcome of R4** was non-beneficiary farmers' secondary adoption of CA techniques after seeing outcomes in R4 farmers' fields. **The unintended negative results were that a poorly built dam in Masvingo collapsed after heavy rains, damaging crops.**

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Furthermore, according to women in Rushinga, **the VSL investment was used to buy and sell high-strength alcoholic beverages to men**. This might have a harmful impact on men's health.

EFFICIENCY

Asset construction (funded outside the R4 budget by USAID and Japan) was the most expensive R4-related activity in absolute terms. Nevertheless, its costs per beneficiary compared favourably with other agricultural interventions in Zimbabwe. The project budget was largely adequate, although there were concerns that allocations to Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) and FFA were insufficient. Delays in delivery of inputs and transfers were kept to a minimum due to a robust funding pipeline.

The project was successful in extending FFA cycles to December each year. The short duration of Field Level Agreements (FLAs) was partly due to government restrictions that FFA work must be conducted between April to September to avoid clashing with rain-fed crop production. **The frequent renegotiation for FLAs added to the implementing partners' workload, and the uncertainty made it difficult for them to retain employees.**

Very few incidences of late delivery of activities were noted in Masvingo. Problems with late payment of insurance premiums by WFP to Old Mutual were reported and handled without affecting the policies purchased. The Covid-19 travel restrictions affected the delivery of some training sessions, particularly those that required staff to travel from outside the district or required Government staff attendance.

In some cases, lack of communication between IPs resulted in trainings being scheduled at the same time, and beneficiaries opting to attend trainings with better incentives. The coordination problems were largely resolved in the latter years of the programme, and efficiencies were realized. Despite the remarkable project-level results, nexus synergies could have been reinforced by better coordination across the LSA, R4 delivery teams, Government, and stakeholders.

The integrated risk management (IRM) approach generated implementation synergies, for example, anecdotal evidence indicated that income from increased production was utilized to make VSL payments, and loans from VSL groups were used to support the purchase of productive assets. Allowing farmers to pay for crop insurance through FFA work served the dual purpose of risk reduction and risk transfer. The synergistic nature of the IRM activities was, therefore, appreciated by beneficiaries in the visited wards, who articulated the benefits of layering the interventions instead of implementing them individually.

Built-in quotas for women's participation in the project design, coupled with communities' perceptions that the

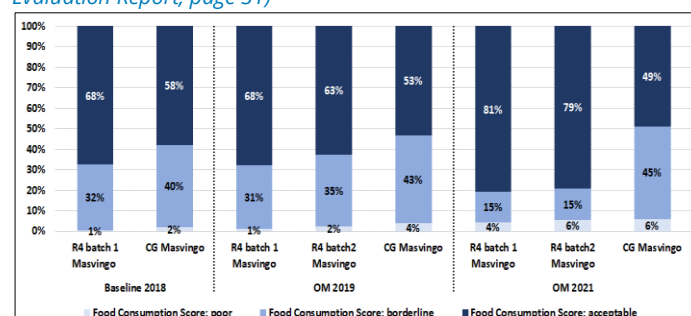
project was designed more for women, ensured high levels of women participation. Youth participation, on the other hand, was restricted by limited access to land and financing and their preference for other income-earning opportunities such as petty trading and illegal gold mining.

IMPACT

Beneficiaries, particularly women, experienced an improvement in food consumption and dietary diversity scores over the course of the project (*Figures 7 and 8*), indicating that R4 was successful in improving beneficiaries' food security.

The percentage of Masvingo batch 1 and 2 beneficiaries with an 'acceptable' **Food Consumption Score (FCS)** (*Figure 7*) increased from 68 percent in 2018 to 81 percent in 2021 for batch 1 households, and from 58 percent to 79 percent for batch 2 households over the same period. The results were impressive for women farmers, with the acceptable FCS rising from 58 percent in 2018 to 84 percent in 2021. Control group households, on the other hand, experienced a decline in their FCS, with those in the 'acceptable' category falling from 58 percent in 2018 to 49 percent in 2021.

Figure 7: Food Consumption Scores (Source: Zimbabwe R4 Evaluation Report, page 31)

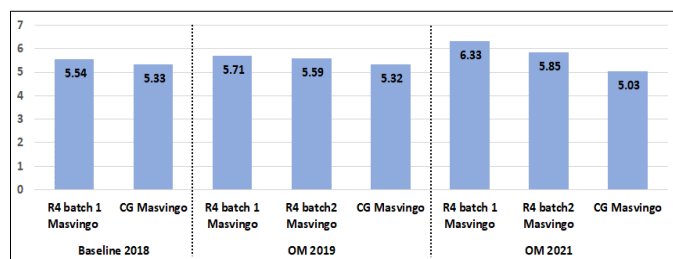


Dietary Diversity Scores (Figure 8) for batch 1 beneficiaries increased from 5.54 in 2018 (5.65 and 5.23 for households headed by men and women respectively) **to 6.33 in 2021**, also eliminating the gender gap (men: 6.31, women: 6.35), while those **for batch 2 households increased from 5.33 to 5.85** over the same period. In contrast, Dietary Diversity Scores for control group households fell from 5.33 to 5.03 over the same period with persistent gender differences (from 5.49 to 5.21 for households headed by men and from 5.13 to 4.95 for households headed by women).

Figure 8: Dietary Diversity Scores (Source: Zimbabwe R4 Evaluation Report, page 31)

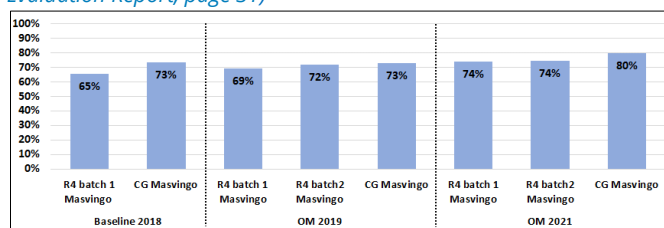
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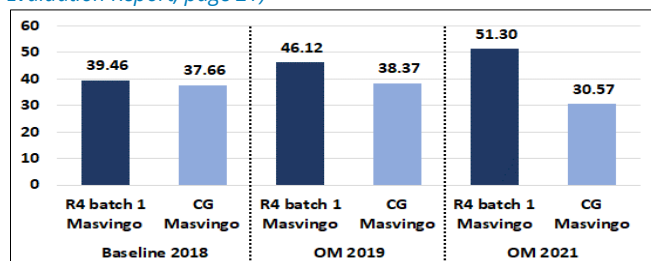
Food Expenditure Scores which represent the proportion of household income that is spent on food (Figure 9) increased for all groups between 2018 and 2021, reflecting the sharp increases in staple food prices over the last two project years. Differences between households headed by men and those headed by women were minor and likely not statistically significant. However, control group households spent a greater proportion of their incomes on food than beneficiary households, suggesting that households that participated in the project could cover most of their consumption needs from their own production.

Figure 9: Food Expenditure Scores (Source: Zimbabwe R4 Evaluation Report, page 31)



The **Resilience Index, Measurement and Analysis¹ (RIMA)** scores for batch 1 beneficiaries in Masvingo, increased from 39.5 in 2018 to 51.3 in 2021 pointing to R4's success, the control group scores decreased from 37.7 to 30.6 over the same period (Figure 10). Evidence suggested that the FFA assets created contributed to increased resilience, resulting in improved protection against extreme weather, improved income-earning opportunities, and enhanced food security. Over 90 percent of respondents reported that participation in R4 helped increase their yields, reduce post-harvest losses, and diversify their livelihoods by growing new types of crops.

Figure 10: Resilience Index Scores (RIMA) (Source: Zimbabwe R4 Evaluation Report, page 21)



¹ Resilience Index Measurement and Analysis, based on an assessment of six variables: food and income access, access to basic services, assets, adaptive capacity, access to social safety nets, and sensitivity to shocks.

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Livelihood Coping Strategy Index scores declined, although beneficiaries have lower (better) scores than non-beneficiaries. However, recourse to coping strategies appears to have increased over the last two years. In 2019, 35 percent of Masvingo batch 1 and 40 percent of control group households did not use any coping strategies. The deterioration could be linked to the sharp rise in food prices.

Although the WFP monitoring system does not explicitly track intra and inter-household power balances, anecdotal evidence suggested that **the R4 project contributed positively to transforming power balances**. Phone surveys revealed that FFA activities were useful in supporting equity and contributed to conflict resolution. The same survey found that 84 percent of women were members of a VSL group (compared to only 74 percent of men) and that 41 percent occupy management roles (compared to 32 percent of men).

The R4 Gender Analysis and Mainstreaming Report (2021) found that the R4 Project had “*significantly improved the participation and power of women in community development projects and decision-making processes, although their power at a household level had remained limited*”. **The evaluation team concluded that the project did not achieve any structural change in gender dynamics, but rather contributed to a longer-term process of change.**

SUSTAINABILITY

While the Government or beneficiaries are unlikely to take over R4 in its current form, given the financial investments required, there are signs that elements of the programme may become common practice at a community level. Assets will continue to function if management committees are effective and are able to collect funds and organize labour for their maintenance. Previous experience has shown that lower-tech household-owned assets such as keyhole gardens are more likely to last than community-owned assets.

Although the farmers were interested in crop insurance, the majority were hesitant to purchase insurance out of their own pockets. They had a strong preference for purchasing the insurance by contributing labour through FFA instead of paying cash. In areas where farmers had experienced the benefits of a pay-out, the concept of the value of crop insurance is likely to persist to some extent, but the level of uptake will be determined by:

- the extent to which crop insurance is promoted by the Government (Agritex) and the private sector,

- price of the insurance product,
- ease of purchase and receipt of pay-outs, and
- farmers' predictive judgment of the level of rainfall that is likely in the coming season.

The feature of the project that is most likely to continue in the manner closest to the R4 form is the VSLs. Many VSLs existed in a less structured way prior to the project, which strengthened them through training on management and the imposition of constitutions.

Beneficiaries placed a high value on VSLs as a means of saving, a source of capital, and social status. This was evidenced by the average personal monthly contributions which increased from US\$ 1.60 to US\$ 3.08 over the project period, with only two percent of groups suspending savings during the first Covid-19 lockdown showing that VSLs are highly resilient to economic shocks. However, due to relatively low levels of capitalization and lack of knowledge of the process, it is unlikely that many VSLs will evolve into formal Savings and Credit Cooperatives (SACCOs).

The strong evidence of the benefits of mechanized CA developed by the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Centre (CYMMIT) increases farmers' prospects of continuing to apply the lessons learned if they could access inputs at an affordable price and at the right time.

Domestication of the various elements of the R4 project within the Government framework is unlikely. Where Government staff capacity was strengthened, for example, in the use of Seasonal Livelihood Planning (SLP) and CBPP, the activities were not complemented by actions to build the institutional and enabling environment to allow the utilization of individual skills. This is in line with the 2021 Zimbabwe CSP evaluation finding that the overall approach to capacity strengthening of national institutions in the CSP lacked strategic ambition and did not include a structured strategy or theory of change to comprehensively articulate how these elements would be scaled up.

FACTORS AFFECTING RESULTS

Positive factors affecting results

- **Community engagement:** Incorporating the community-level planning into FFA promoted the relevancy of the assets created to beneficiaries' circumstances. FFA also created bonds of social cohesion which are required for the effective functioning of VSLs.
- **A multi-year approach to FFA** where the same beneficiaries worked on a series of assets over a three-year period significantly increased the utility of the assets.
- **The integrated nature of R4** resulted in greater synergies and outcomes compared to having a single activity. For instance, beneficiaries used income from VSL

to support small purchases for their farms, and assets built under FFA (e.g., livestock housing) resulted in income streams that could be used to make VSL contributions or cover food consumption needs.

- **Support by Implementing Partners (IPs):** IPs established systems to encourage better participation by Agritex staff and mitigate the impact of their limited attendance. IPs provided government extension workers with training materials and personal protective equipment during the pandemic. In addition, IPs facilitated the use of locally based lead farmers and 'Village Based Agents' to conduct agricultural trainings.

Negative factors affecting results

- **An overlap of the lean season assistance** at the start of FFA resulted in beneficiaries being reluctant to work for food when they could get the same (or more) for free.
- **Timing and duration of activities:** Conservation agriculture was conducted too late in the season to be put into practice and little time was allocated for capacity building.
- **Lack of synergy: Implementing partners (IPs) revealed that having different R4 interventions delivered by separate IPs resulted in a tendency by IPs to prioritize their own agendas.** Better synergies and activity sequencing could have been achieved by organizing IPs into a consortium under a single budget.
- **Weak Government capacity:** R4 stakeholders highlighted that Government staff lacked motivation and often transport, resulting in some agricultural training sites lacking oversight, which, reduced the effectiveness and impact of R4.
- **Unpredictable economic climate:** Managing the insurance component in the Zimbabwe economic climate was challenging. The government's Statutory Instrument made it impossible to buy a policy through the EcoCash mobile money, resulting in time-consuming manual registration of farmers by WFP. The unpredictable economic climate discouraged insurance providers from rolling out another agricultural insurance product and made it very difficult for farmers to access loans from financial institutions. While crop insurance contracts were priced in US dollars, pay-outs were made in Zimbabwe dollars, resulting in the real value depreciating between the time the policy was triggered and when payments were made.
- **Climate Change:** Zimbabwe was affected by severe dry spells in the 2018/2019 and 2019/2020 seasons resulting in below-average maize yields.

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- **The Covid-19 restrictions** on inter-district movement and limits to gatherings affected the construction of assets, delivery of training, technical oversight of project activities, and farmers' access to markets.

LESSONS LEARNED

The evaluation formulated four lessons presented below:

1. The long-run role of WFP as safety net provider in Zimbabwe: In the absence of any formal safety net programme in Zimbabwe, WFP projects are often the closest alternative for farmers in the face of recurring shocks and will likely remain so in the foreseeable future, with limited prospects of farmers 'graduating' from R4.

2. Limits of partnerships with the Government: Delivering classical safety net programmes in collaboration with the Government is currently not a viable option. While WFP's resilience actions are strongly aligned to government policies on smallholder agriculture and building resilience, forming autonomous partnerships with district administrations may be difficult.

3. Strong coordination role for WFP Field Offices: If stronger linkages with local administrations are to become reality, WFP Field Offices will have to be appropriately staffed and resourced.

4. Consideration of scale-up, duration of engagement, and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) issues: Piloting new approaches such as R4 requires careful consideration of scale, duration, incremental roll-out, and M&E. The small scale of R4 meant that the challenges associated with rapid scale-up were largely avoided. The length of time that beneficiaries are engaged in the programme is correlated to improved outcomes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The evaluation team developed a set of operation and strategic recommendations presented below. The detailed recommendations including the level of priority and timelines are presented in the main R4 evaluation report.

Recommendation 1: Investigate the relative utility and sustainability of 'community built / individually owned' and 'community built / community owned' assets under FFA through a study that includes an analysis of sustainability, cost and benefits, and impacts on community cohesion. *(Operational)*

Recommendation 2: Ensure that successes in mechanized conservation agriculture are widely communicated and form the basis of advocacy for Government support. *(Strategic)*

Recommendation 3: Strive to provide better opportunities for more young people to participate in the programme. This includes exploring actions that do not require access to large areas of land and working with village headmen to facilitate access to unused land by young people while considering gender aspects. *(Strategic)*

Recommendation 4: Continue to 'prime the pump' for a reliable supply of appropriate equipment and inputs through the provision of smart subsidies. These subsidies should be designed on a cost recovery basis, and while monitoring the way that supply chain responds to the stimulated demand. *(Strategic)*

Recommendation 5: Subsequent integrated risk management actions should aim for a minimum of five years' engagement with farmers. Building resilience takes time and entails providing support through an array of actions including LSA (where necessary) and R4 over several years. WFP should consider enrolling a new cohort of farmers to R4 from within the existing operational districts every year. *(Strategic)*

Recommendation 6: Encourage smallholders' uptake of crop insurance through a range of actions including communication, management, and advocacy. This includes working with insurance providers to improve awareness; using locally based agents to process payments and claims, and maintaining a watching brief on the success of 'bundling' insurance with agricultural inputs *(Operational)*

Recommendation 7: Explore the validity of assumptions relating to microcredit that underpin the R4 Theory of Change. WFP should seek to better understand the constraints and risks that characterize the microcredit market in Zimbabwe and explore how specialist agencies such as IFAD can contribute to addressing the gaps in the existing microcredit. *(Strategic)*

Recommendation 8: Strive to ensure smallholder productivity is given the budgetary priority required. *(Strategic)*

Reference:

Full evaluation reports and the Management Response are available at <https://www.wfp.org/publications/zimbabwe-r4-rural-resilience-initiative-masvingo-and-rushinga-evaluation>
For more information, please contact the Office of Evaluation wfp.decentralizedevaluation@wfp.org

LIST OF ACRONYMS

AGRITEX	Department of Agricultural Advisory Services
CA	Conservation Agriculture
CBPP	Community Based Participatory Planning
CG	Control Group
CIMMYT	International Maize and Wheat Improvement Centre
CO	Country Office
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
CSP	Country Strategic Plan
EQ	Evaluation Question
FCS	Food Consumption Score
FDG	Focus Group Discussion
FFA	Food Assistance for Assets
FLA	Field Level Agreements
GEWE	Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment
HQ	Headquarter
ICA	Integrated Context Analysis
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
IP	Implementing Partners
IRM	Integrated Risk Management
LSA	Lean Season Assistance
PMG	Producer Marketing Group
RB	Regional Bureau
RIMA	Resilience Index and Measurement and Analysis
SACCO	Savings and Credit Cooperatives
SAMS	Smallholder Agricultural Market Support
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SLP	Seasonal Livelihood Planning
UN	United Nations
SD	United States Dollar
VSL	Village Savings and Loan
WFP	World Food Programme
ZUNDAF	Zimbabwe United Nations Development Assistance Framework

Reference:

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