



Cattle can provide year-round food and income in dry areas where crops don't grow well, boosting resilience and nutrition.

Harnessing the power of cattle to drive change

This project explores ways to bring together valued traditions and new technologies to boost women's economic status, empowering them to build up a network of climate-resilient businesses, centred around dairy farming.

Nurturing cash cows

In rural Zimbabwe, cattle are a form of currency and savings, as well as a vital source of milk and meat, giving poor households something to fall back on in times of crisis. Commercial cattle farming is dominated by men, but this project seeks to empower women to enter and thrive in the sector.

Mombe Yehumai (Mother's Cow) is a ceremonial marriage tradition, whereby the groom gifts his mother-in-law a cow, to thank her for raising a daughter.

The cow belongs to the woman alone. It gives her an independent source of wealth, with potential for growth as the cow has calves. In a context where

women have limited income, influence and independence, Mombe Yehumai represents a remarkable opportunity. But many poor women lack the skills and support to make the most of it.

Phase one of this project will explore ways to build on and enhance the Mombe Yehumai tradition, empowering women in drought-prone areas with the knowledge and skills to build up healthy herds and profitable businesses that can flourish in the increasingly harsh climactic conditions.

PROJECT SUMMARY

Full name of project: Enhancing resilience through Mombe Yehumai (phase one)

Location: Mudzi district, Zimbabwe

Duration: February to June 2024

Partner: Agricultural Partnerships Trust

Budget: £48,380

LOCATION:

Mudzi district, Zimbabwe

- Dry rural area in eastern Zimbabwe
- Prone to drought and unpredictable rainfall
- 90% of households live in poverty
- High rates of hunger and malnutrition – one third of children are stunted.



LIVELIHOODS:

Dairy farming

A network of businesses

- Cattle farming
- Milk and dairy products
- Butchers and beef products
- Animal feed and fodder
- Breeding services

Adding value

PHASE ONE: FEASIBILITY STUDY

Although many women in Mudzi own livestock, this is usually only at a small-scale, household level. Phase one of this project will look into ways to equip rural women to scale up and take on higher value roles that will boost their incomes, growing their herds and building a network of complementary women-led and climate-resilient businesses that span the dairy and beef value chains. This will feature four key assessments:

- **Enhancing Mombe Yehumai:** the project will investigate ways to empower women who receive cows through Mombe Yehumai, while also exploring routes to reach women who do not currently own a cow. It will map existing women's groups, assess knowledge gaps and evaluate breeding options, exploring hardy species with higher milk yields.
- **Removing barriers:** a gender-focused assessment will look into the opportunities and barriers relevant to women across these value chains, such as their access to land, finance, knowledge, equipment, information, technology and markets, and ways to overcome these barriers.
- **Introducing technology:** digital appraisals will explore innovative technologies that could enhance women's capacity to access information and markets. Options include basic computers, business software and chatbots accessed via mobile phones.
- **Understanding markets:** evaluations will focus on supply and demand for core products such as milk, and will also explore related business opportunities within the value chain, including animal feed such as cactus. A year-round crop which tolerates extremely dry conditions, cactus could, crucially, provide cattle with water as well as food through the dry season and during times of drought.

'Mombe Yehumai provides a unique opportunity to bring women into the traditionally male-dominated dairy value chain. This project will empower them to make the most of that opportunity, boosting their income, their security and their status.'

Giant Mudimba, Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability, Learning and Safeguarding Officer, Zimbabwe

PHASE TWO: DELIVERY

Assuming the project proceeds to phase 2, the focus of activities will be based upon the findings from the feasibility study. This approach will ensure we are maximising opportunities to empower women to participate at all levels of the dairy and beef value chains, building businesses that will boost both nutrition and income in areas of high poverty and hunger, and will provide vital security through periods of drought or crisis.

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