

HELPING HAND 2021 - FEEDING HOPE: ALL GENERATIONS SUPPORTING ALL GENERATIONS

In rural Zimbabwe, there are a group of farmers. The plots of land that each farmer owns have been in the individual families for many generations and the farmers have learnt the traditional methods of planting and harvesting maize from their mothers/fathers who were farmers before them. In recent years, they have seen how even their most successful harvests are less than what they were able to grow before. The soil in their land is depleted of nutrients and the irregular rains make it almost impossible to judge when is the best time to sow their seeds. They can no longer afford to purchase the expensive fertiliser which their soil has become dependent on for any crop production.

JANET MAZURA

The family plot of land that Janet owns has been in her family for three generations and she has learnt the traditional methods of planting and harvesting maize from her father. She lives together with her five children, and the pressure to grow enough produce to feed her family and to earn some money for school fees weighs heavily on her mind. Janet is a widow as her husband died of an illness some years ago. She longs for a better life, one that will be free from worry about the future. Maybe she should give up farming altogether and sell her land – maybe the only option for her eldest two children is to leave home and get jobs in the city. At least that will get some money in for the family. For the last few months Janet hasn't been able to pay the school fees and she knows it will only be a matter of time before the head teacher of the school will stop her children attending. On top of this she worries about providing the right nutrition for her children. She has concerns that her children may become malnourished, though she always makes sure they are fed before she gets her own, sometimes going without food or with an incredibly small portion herself to ensure the children get the food.

Janet hears about some agricultural training that is taking place in her area organised by her Salvation Army corps officer. The corps compound has a small plot of land no bigger than her own that the corps officer has used to grow some maize using some new growing techniques. It is already starting to produce a harvest bigger than hers. Janet is intrigued and wants to find out more. She attends a few sessions run in the corps hall and listens closely to the corps officer and to an agriculturalist from a local university who is leading the sessions. The techniques they teach are different from



the ones that she has learnt as a child. She learns how to better manage the water for her crops and recycle the nutrients back into the soil so it doesn't become depleted.

At first this all sounds too good to be true, but with the pressure she is under and the failing harvests she's seen, Janet doesn't have anything to lose. So immediately she begins to try out some of the new techniques.

JANET MAZURA (CONTINUED)

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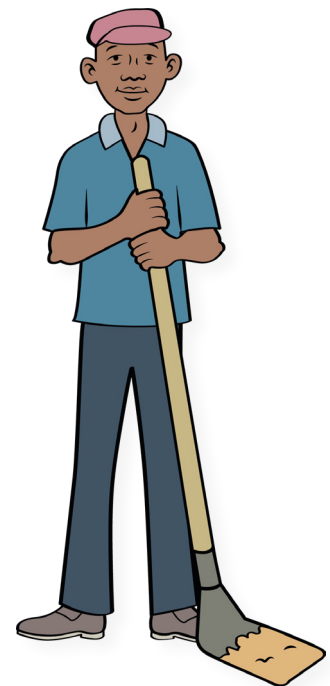
The small-scale farmers are trained in the importance of mulching their crops while ensuring minimal disturbance of the soil. This helps to protect the fertile top layer of soil from being eroded by rain or wind and conserves soil moisture from evaporation. When the mulch materials rot down, soil fertility is increased, so farmers do not need to purchase expensive synthetic fertilisers. The farmers are also trained how to plant their seeds with precision, using straight lines and holes, and how to rotate diverse crops to ensure continued food production and nutrition. When the seed is planted at the onset of the rains, the crops thrive before the dry spells hit, which means bigger yields. The combination of these methods ensures farmers are saved from the laborious burden of cultivating their land so frequently and reduces expenses of artificial fertiliser.

Janet notices small changes at first: the soil seems to be able to hold more moisture than before, the seedlings look stronger, and more seeds have sprouted. The hope within her starts to grow – maybe this is the beginning of a bumper harvest. She continues to tend her crop and speaks with her friends who were also in the training – their crops are showing encouraging signs too. Things are looking up for Janet.

Finally, when it comes to the harvest, Janet cannot believe the results. Double what she has managed in the last year! For now, hunger is kept at bay for Janet and her large family. Janet is full of hope for the next growing season – she knows she might be able to grow even more next year. She has seen how small changes in the way she plants and nurtures her crops can make a huge difference. She has renewed hope for the future.

NIMROD MANGANO

Nimrod, a friend of Janet, had been speaking with her a lot. He told Janet how his wife struggles with her health and how their farm, passed down two generations, was not bringing in enough money for the family to be able to afford the medicine required to help treat his wife. Nimrod is currently focused on feeding and educating his three children and three nieces and nephew that he adopted when his wife's sister died, so he finds it incredibly hard to get the help for his wife. Janet explained that she had joined an agricultural training programme at the local Salvation Army corps and is learning new techniques to grow maize. Nimrod jumped at the opportunity and joined alongside Janet. Since adapting to the new methods of farming, his crops have been larger than years before, and this has meant he can now afford to purchase medicine for his wife to improve her health. Nimrod and his family are feeling hopeful for the future as the farm continues to thrive with these new techniques.



GUDU SHEMBELE

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During the agricultural training, Janet and Nimrod became friends with many other farmers in the group. Gudu was one of them. Gudu and his wife, Nicole, live with their four children. The farm has been passed down many generations and Gudu is keen to pass it on to his eldest son, Akudzwe. Akudzwe is hesitant to help and potentially take over, because the farm hasn't been doing so well recently due to the climate and he didn't want to put time and effort into a farm that could potentially never really make any income. Akudzwe has a big decision to make. Does he stay to help and learn on the farm to eventually take it over when his father retires, or should he go in search of casual labour? Gudu heard about the corps training programme through friends in his community. He decided to go along and Akudzwe joined him. Whilst they were taking part in the training, they learnt these new methods and adapted their farm to include these changes for growing maize. When Akudzwe saw the farm flourish and witnessed the benefits these new techniques have made, he decided to stay and work alongside his father until the time comes for him to take over. Not only has the training had an impact on the farm, but it also had an impact on the father and son relationship, bringing them closer together. Gudu is happy that the farm is staying within the family and hopes that one day Akudzwe will pass it on to his own children.

ANERUDO ANESU

Anerudo is a young man supporting his mother and younger siblings. He has been managing his family farm for a few years now, and despite his attempts, the farm continues not to thrive. Anerudo joined the local agricultural training programme when a neighbouring farmer mentioned what she had learnt during her time and how well her farm has been doing since then. When Anerudo took over the farm from his mother as she was getting older, he started to question whether he was farming correctly. When he learnt the new techniques at the training, he felt confident in making the changes to his farm. After the first season, the increased amount of maize he was able to produce meant he could sell the surplus at the markets. This put him in a position to buy chickens and goats to breed and sell for further income. He also has a passion for helping others, and has since taught the new techniques to his friends and neighbouring farmers to help them and their farms thrive.



AKATENDEKA ANAISHE

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Akatendeka is a soldier at her local Salvation Army corps in Zimbabwe. In the past, The Salvation Army has supported her and her family during difficult times, especially when she faced the loss of her husband and, more recently, when her children were ill. Akatendeka would like to be in a position where she can give money back to her church through her tithe. Her farm has been in her family for many generations. She takes the lead on the farm and her children help when they aren't at school. She confided in her corps officer about the struggles she has faced with the farm, and was invited to the training programme. When Akatendeka put the new techniques to use, she noticed the difference almost immediately and was able to achieve her goal of giving back to the church through her tithe. Akatendeka remains happy with her farm, family and church and she thanks God for all that he has done.



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