

## VSO ACTIVE Deep Dive Research Study in Zimbabwe and Mozambique – blog for the website

The ACTIVE programme implemented by VSO has led to the successful adoption and expansion of agroecological practices by smallholder farmers in Zimbabwe and Mozambique.

We found that the ACTIVE programme has led to the successful adoption and expansion of agroecological practices by smallholder farmers in specific locations. Changes to livelihoods and increased incomes from the sale of surplus production have been notable outcomes of adopting agroecology practices. There was also evidence of improvements to soil conditions and food security, providing better nutrition and healthier diets. As a result of VSO training and advocacy work, there was evidence of improved engagement between communities and local officials, especially in Zimbabwe, leading to improved accessibility to government services and community involvement in the publication of the Agroecology Promotion Policy and Strategy in 2024, an important milestone after years in gestation.



Overall, this well-adapted agroecological programme has supported farmers in more appropriate low input and diversified farming methods enabling them to improve their livelihoods and incomes from agriculture in more marginal zones. Adopting a range of agroecological practices has given farmers more confidence and security in coping with the increasingly erratic climate they are experiencing. Yet, despite the work of ACTIVE, these outcomes of improved resilience have only been realised by a small proportion of farmers within the affected communities.

**There is enormous potential to replicate and scale up the work both within the existing programme areas as well as more widely in-country and regionally.**

Domestic government support will be critical as VSO looks to scale up and build on its successes in Zimbabwe and to a lesser degree, in Mozambique. We identified a number of important factors that are crucial for achieving success:

*Photo: Elizabeth Mpofu in her farm, Shashe Village, Mashava, Zimbabwe (Credit: Ekaterina Shaleva)*

1. The low barriers to entry and synergies with the environment make agroecology practices particularly appropriate for primary actors (farmers) in marginal areas subject to climate risks.
2. The effectiveness of the agroecology programme lies in its positive effect on a range of livelihood aspects for primary actors (incomes, nutrition, social capital), which are all important elements in addressing multi-dimensional poverty.
3. VSO's ability to build significant partnerships is an integral part of delivering on the agroecology programme.

4. Capacity strengthening of communities in realising their rights and engaging with local officials to hold them to account for their obligations of service provision is key.
5. Looking ahead, consideration of governance factors (e.g. government resource allocation) in the delivery of the agroecology programme will be instrumental in achieving transformational change from the observed improvements in active citizenship and duty bearer accountability.
6. The formulation (and subsequent future implementation) of the national Agroecology Strategy, in which VSO has played a key role, helps to signal the value of agroecology and should lead to increased recognition by farmers and the market



*Photo: Queen Manjokwiro in her farm, Biriri Village, Chimanimani, Zimbabwe (Credit: Ekaterina Shaleva)*

### Project details

Triple Line was commissioned by VSO to conduct a deep dive research study of its agroecology work within the FCDO-funded Active Citizenship Through Inclusive Volunteering and Empowerment (ACTIVE) programme (2022-2025) between January and March 2025.<sup>1</sup> The aim of the study was to provide evidence of the programme's effectiveness in generating positive changes for "primary actors" (the term VSO uses for the people they aim to support through their interventions) in Zimbabwe and Mozambique and any early signs of impact in reducing poverty and improving climate adaptation in farmers' lives. The regional agroecology programme within ACTIVE is implemented in Zimbabwe, Mozambique and Eswatini and is largely focused on livelihoods, with a particularly strong focus on agroecology, climate smart agriculture, disaster risk reduction and youth empowerment. Local partners and volunteers form the backbone for the delivery of the agroecology work, with VSO providing critical funds, capacity or technical assistance, stakeholder engagement and partnership

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<sup>1</sup> The ACTIVE programme was extended to three more years, until 2028.

building. As part of the study, we produced two stories of change to illustrate the changes in two smallholder farmer's lives in Zimbabwe. You can find them [here](#).

If you'd like to learn more about Triple Line's work in the volunteering for development space, get in touch with the team.