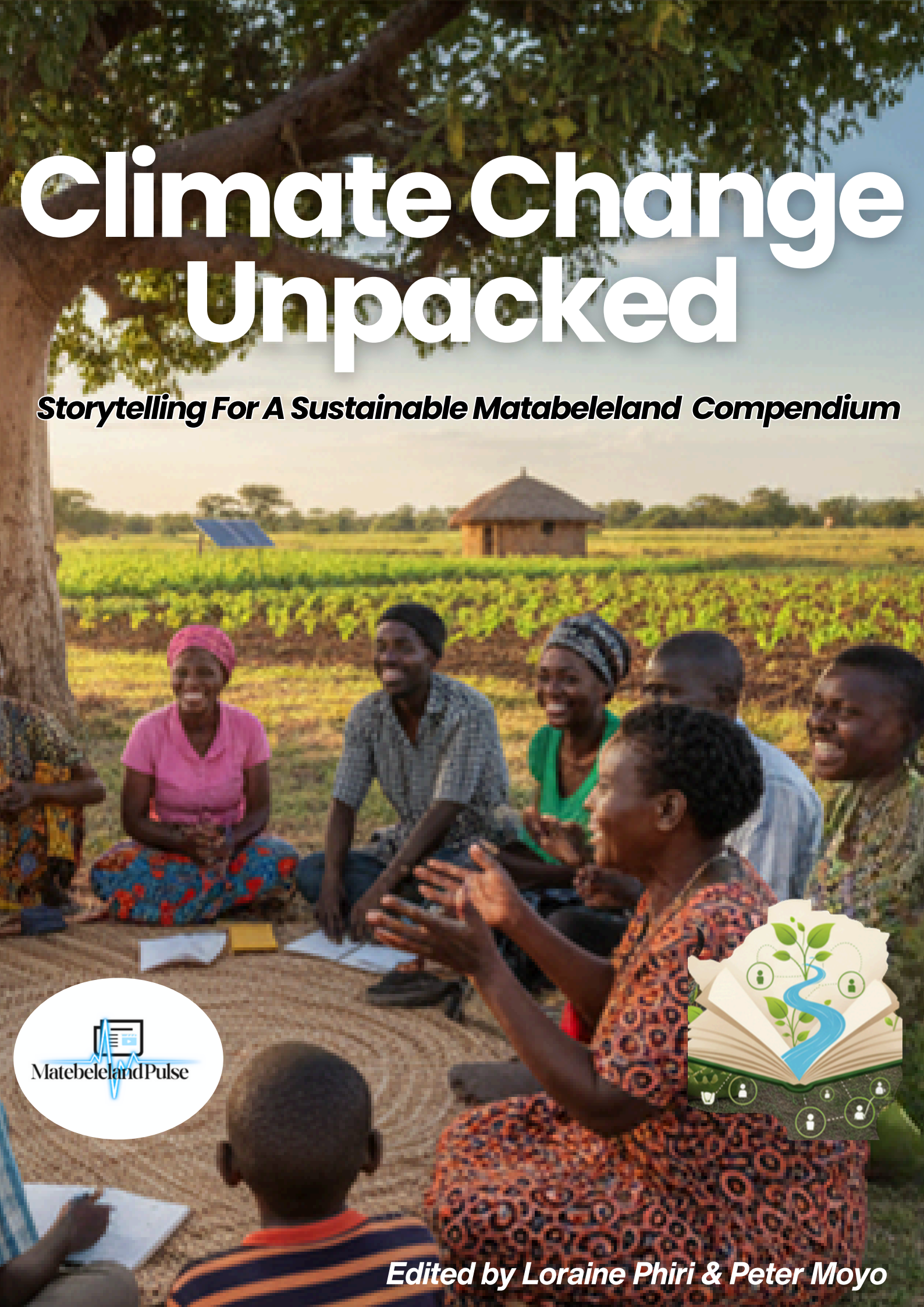
Climate Change Unpacked

Storytelling For A Sustainable Matabeleland Compendium



MatebelelandPulse

Edited by Loraine Phiri & Peter Moyo

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Editorial Note

Loraine Phiri

Climate change is no longer a distant threat or a scientific abstraction for communities in Matabeleland. It is present in dry riverbeds where water once flowed freely, in failed harvests that deepen hunger, in families forced to migrate, and in children growing up without parents who have left in search of survival.

This compendium, Climate Change Unpacked: Storytelling for a Sustainable Matabeleland, brings together lived experiences, grassroots voices, and local solutions that reveal how climate change is reshaping everyday life. Moreover, how communities are responding with resilience, innovation, and hope.

The stories in this collection are rooted in real places and real people. Farmers speak candidly about unpredictable seasons. Urban growers navigate climate shocks in the city. Communities openly debate what climate change means for their future. These are not statistics — they are human stories that show climate change as a social, economic, and cultural issue.

At the same time, the compendium highlights young innovators and creatives who refuse to be passive victims of climate change. From turning waste into art and enterprise, to transforming food waste into economic opportunity, young people in Matabeleland are reimagining sustainability as both survival and possibility. Their stories challenge narratives of helplessness and instead present climate action as locally driven and youth-powered.

Civil society organisations and community-based initiatives also feature in this collection. NGOs, trusts, and grassroots movements are working alongside communities to promote cleaner energy, protect wildlife, reduce environmental degradation, and strengthen climate resilience. Their work shows that meaningful climate action happens not only in boardrooms and policies, but in villages, townships, and shared community spaces.

Water, its absence, its management, and its future emerges as a central thread throughout the compendium. In a region increasingly defined by drought and water stress, lessons on water harvesting and conservation offer practical pathways for adaptation and survival.

Together, these stories form a people-centred climate narrative for Matabeleland — one that recognises hardship, but also celebrates ingenuity, solidarity, and determination. This compendium is both a record of the present and a call to action: to listen to communities, invest in local solutions, support youth innovation, and place storytelling at the heart of climate justice.

Climate change is being unpacked here not in theory, but through the voices of those living it.

Acknowledgements

Climate Change Unpacked: Storytelling for a Sustainable Matabeleland is part of Matebeleland Pulse's Climate Change Unpacked initiative a storytelling project dedicated to amplifying local voices, lived experiences, and community-driven solutions to climate change across Matabeleland.

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We extend our sincere appreciation to Matebeleland Pulse Director, Peter Moyo, for his leadership, vision, and unwavering support of climate-focused storytelling and community-centred journalism in the region.

We gratefully acknowledge the dedication and commitment of Matpulse reporters, whose work forms the backbone of this compendium: Tendai Nyambara, Thembelihle Mhlanga, Providence Moyo, Nqobizwe Thebe, Sharon Muchara, Buhlebenkosi Sibanda and Jabulile Siwela

Editorial coordination and curation of this compendium were led by Loraine Phiri, who served as the Project lead and Editor, guiding the storytelling framework, thematic structure, and narrative coherence of Climate Change Unpacked: Storytelling for a Sustainable Matabeleland.

We also acknowledge the valuable support of partners, resource persons, and trainers who contributed their expertise, mentorship, and guidance throughout the project. Special thanks go to Polina Maximova, Atupere Phiri, Jacqueline Ndlovu, Lungelo Ndlovu, Mandela Washington Fellowship Michigan State University Team, Amagugu International Heritage Centre, Allington Ndlovu, Mellisa Moyo, Melinkosi Dube, Elizabeth Phiri, Phathisani Vundla. Their contributions strengthened both the quality and impact of this storytelling initiative.

This compendium does not exhaust all experiences of climate change in Matabeleland. Rather, it represents a selection of stories within a broader and ongoing storytelling journey. Climate Change Unpacked is a continuous project, committed to documenting evolving climate realities, emerging innovations, and diverse community voices as climate impacts and responses continue to unfold across the region.

Finally, we extend our deepest gratitude to Matobo and Mpopoma communities, and Matebeleland Pulse whatsapp community, Mimi Matobo, Sukoluhle Ndebele, Bhekumuzi Mathe, Praise Mlambo, Mandisa Nozinhle Nyoni, Bongani Mandizvidza, Deep Plough, Mafakela Task Force and Civil Society Organisations including Climate Control, Women's Institute for Leadership Development, Mainah Trust and Voices for Water, who generously shared their stories, experiences, and perspectives. Their voices are the heart of this compendium, and their lived realities ground the climate conversation in Matabeleland. As this project continues, Matebeleland Pulse remains committed to telling climate stories that are rooted in community experience, justice, and locally driven solutions.

Climate Change and Lived Realities

How climate change is affecting livelihoods, families, and survival

These stories document the everyday impacts of climate change in Matabeleland — water scarcity, food insecurity, migration, and uncertainty.

1. **When the Rains Fail: Climate Crisis Pushes Rural Families to the Brink**
   By Thembelihle Mhlanga

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When the Rains Fail: Climate Crisis Pushes Rural Families to the Brink.

Thembelihle Mhlanga

In Mazwa village, located in the drier areas of Matabeleland North, Gogo Rita Ngwenya, an 81-year-old widow, works daily to support her family against the persistent effects of climate change. With two orphaned grandchildren, aged 15 and 17, depending on her. Gogo Ngwenya's situation illustrates how environmental degradation translates into immediate economic and social hardship in rural communities.

Gogo Ngwenya's recollections contrast sharply with the present reality. "I remember when my cattle used to graze freely, and the rains were enough to fill the granary. Now, the sky stays dry, and the drought has taken everything, my cattle, my crops, and almost my hope," she states.

For her, the recurrent droughts constitute a persistent crisis that threatens the viability of traditional rural livelihoods. As precipitation becomes more erratic, her efforts in farming have become a daily effort against unpredictable environmental conditions.

Gogo Ngwenya describes the difficulties of subsistence farming in the area. Despite digging the soil by hand, the high temperatures and dry spells often lead to crop failure. "I cultivate what little I can myself. But the sun is unforgiving, and the rains are never on time. Sometimes, I get a handful of maize or groundnuts, sometimes nothing at all," she explains.

The loss of her cattle represented a significant blow to the family's economic stability. In this community, livestock typically serves as a primary financial asset and security mechanism. Their death due to prolonged drought conditions has removed her main buffer against financial vulnerability, eroding her sources of income from sales and harvests.

Gogo Rita Ngwenya

The economic pressure resulting from climate impacts directly affects the future of Gogo Ngwenya's grandchildren. Diminished income has rendered paying school fees impossible, forcing her two grandchildren who were attending Form 1 and Form 3 to drop out of secondary school.

"It broke my heart to make them leave school, but we had no choice," she says. "Feeding us all was more important than books."

This widespread challenge has significant implications for development, as continuity in education is widely recognized as essential for breaking cycles of poverty in rural Zimbabwe.

In response to the loss of educational opportunities, Gogo Ngwenya's grandchildren have sought income through artisanal mining. "They help in small-scale mining because it is the only work they find nearby. It's dangerous, but what else can they do?" she says.

Artisanal mining often operates informally and carries associated risks, including exposure to health hazards, potential exploitation, and legal complications. However, this pathway highlights the desperate need for income in the absence of viable agricultural employment.

Continuation

Gogo Ngwenya has also employed indigenous entrepreneurial methods to supplement the family's income, selling indigenous chickens and crafting baskets and mats. "The chickens sell fast at the market, and I learned how to weave from my mother. It helps a little, but it's not enough to cover all our needs." These efforts underscore the role of traditional skills and local resources in providing a measure of resilience, even as they fall short of meeting total needs.

Gogo Ngwenya's family's experience is consistent with broader trends across Zimbabwe's rural communities. Reports from the Zimbabwe Meteorological Services Department indicate that shifting rainfall patterns and rising mean temperatures are intensifying drought cycles. Experts emphasize that Zimbabwe faces compounded challenges, including the interaction of water scarcity, diminished soil fertility, and crop failures with pre-existing socioeconomic issues such as poverty and limited access to public services.

A local education officer familiar with the area highlights the long-term societal consequences of rising dropout rates: "When children leave school prematurely, society loses talented individuals, and poverty becomes entrenched." Similarly, social workers express concern regarding the increased risks faced by children involved in informal employment like artisanal mining, stressing the necessity for community-supported, safer economic alternatives.

Local NGOs and community advocacy groups are currently pushing for enhanced climate adaptation strategies. These include the implementation of drought-resistant seed varieties, the expansion of water harvesting technologies, and the creation of formal income diversification programs.

These initiatives aim to reduce the vulnerability experienced by households such as Gogo Ngwenya's. However, scaling up these adaptation measures is frequently slowed by infrastructural limitations and resource constraints within the region.

Despite these complex challenges, Gogo Ngwenya remains focused on her family's immediate needs.

"I do what I can, every day, to care for my grandchildren and keep hope alive. Our land may be dry, but my love for them is deep."

Her story provides a crucial qualitative perspective on the quantitative data surrounding climate change, poverty, and educational access in rural Zimbabwe.

“Farming Is Now a Gamble”: Matobo Community Shares Harsh Realities of Climate Change

Loraine Phiri

Climate change is reshaping life in Matobo, where once-predictable rainfall patterns have collapsed, crop yields have sharply declined, and women are carrying an increasing share of the physical labour of farming

These concerns emerged on Friday during a community dialogue hosted by Matpulse in partnership with Amagugu International Heritage Centre, where villagers discussed lived experiences of climate change and co-created adaptation solutions ahead of the new farming season.

Villagers said climate change is no longer a distant threat but a daily reality undermining food security. Erratic rainfall, recurrent dry spells and extreme heat have disrupted traditional farming systems that for generations depended on reliable seasonal cycles.

For generations, Matobo farmers relied on predictable seasonal markers such as imbolisamahlanga, the early transitional spring rains usually received in July or August, to guide planting decisions. That certainty is now gone.

“We are seeing less rain and the temperatures are too hot. Our yields are no longer consistent; sometimes we harvest something, sometimes we get nothing at all,” said Sinikiwe Dube. “It’s no longer like the past when a harvest was almost guaranteed. The rains are now erratic and unpredictable."

“In the past, we knew that imbolisamahlanga (early transitional spring rains) would fall around July or August. This rain would soften the dry maize stalks in the fields, allowing them to rot and enrich the soil before we planted. Now, the moment it rains, we rush to plant. Sometimes it is too early and the crop fails, and sometimes we are lucky and get a small harvest. But the certainty is gone,” said Dube.

Another villager, Sipho Dube, echoed these concerns, noting that even diversifying crops no longer guarantee a harvest. He highlighted that currently the rains were insufficient, poorly distributed, or end too early. This means crops especially maize and even some small grains fail to reach full maturity, leading to poor yields or total crop failure.

“Traditionally, our people always grew a diverse range of crops, and we continue to do so. But the biggest problem now is the extreme climate. Even drought resistant sorghum sometimes gets burnt by the sun or fails to mature because there is not enough sustained rainfall.

Continuation

"Farming today is a gamble. The climate is so difficult for us farmers to determine. Last year, some people planted early, but the rains delayed, and they got nothing. I delayed planting and managed to get a small harvest. It is all down to chance," said Dube.

The shifting climate has also intensified the workload for women. Villagers observed that men are increasingly absent from the fields, leaving women to shoulder most of the labour.

Steward Ncube highlighted this shift: "I have noticed that we no longer see men in the fields most of the work is now being done by women. Long back there was division of labour but now women handle most of the farming."

Nomvulelo Nyoni described the shift from gentle, welcoming rains to frightening, destructive downpours: "In the past rains were gentle and you could walk in the rain and feel happy. Now the rains are violent and scary."

To cope with poor yields, most participants now rely on conservation agriculture techniques, locally known as intwasa/ gatshompo/pfumvudza. While effective, the manual labour required is daunting.

"We now depend on intwasa (conservation farming pits). However, digging the holes when the ground is dry is extremely hard work. As women, this labour is very painful and is harming our bodies," said Nyoni.

Despite these challenges, community members and agricultural experts are working together on practical adaptation strategies. Agricultural officer Mandla Moyo affirmed the need for change, urging the community to "evolve and adapt."

Moyo stressed the critical need to diversify and move away from sole reliance on maize. "We should increase our production of small grains such as sorghum, millet and cow peas," he advised, noting that small grains are far more drought-resistant than maize and can survive if rains come late.

To ease the labour burden of gatshompo, Moyo advised farmers to begin preparing their fields early and to consider using cattle-drawn rippers as a mechanized alternative to manual digging.

"Intwasa is not limited to manually digging of planting holes. Farmers can also use cattle-drawn rippers, which make the process much easier. A ripper breaks the hard soil surface, improves moisture infiltration, and creates planting lines in a single pass," he explained. "For many farmers, especially women, this reduces the heavy labour of digging hole by hole. Let us also dig holes early to avoid over burdening ourselves so that we can plant on time when the rains come," he said.

Moyo also encouraged farmers to rely on locally available resources. "Before turning to fertiliser, make use of what you already have. Ashes can help reduce soil acidity, while manure adds vital nutrients. The quality of manure depends on the livestock's diet, with goat manure from animals feeding on leguminous plants being particularly rich," he said.

Farmers like Manyathi shared additional techniques such as digging furrows to direct and retain water in crop rows. Other villagers advised preparing compost properly before applying it to fields. They warned that raw compost can attract termites if not fully decomposed and recommended allowing livestock to trample and moisten compost to speed up breakdown and improve its effectiveness.

Climate Change Pushes Parents to Migrate, Leaving Children Alone in Lupane

Thembelihle Mhlanga

The morning heat settles quickly over Lupane, rising off the dry ground that once supported thriving fields. Years of inconsistent rainfall and recurring droughts have transformed much of the area into hardened soil, leaving families who depended on small-scale farming with fewer options.

Among those affected are two children, a Grade 7 boy and his younger sister in Grade 4, whose parents left for South Africa earlier this year. With harvests repeatedly failing and casual work opportunities disappearing, the couple, here referred to as Bongani Sibanda and Siphiwe Ncube to protect their identity, joined many others seeking informal work across the border. Their children remained behind.

Teachers at a local primary school say the children's situation is not unique. Several households are struggling as climate shocks push adults to migrate, often with no certainty of income once they arrive in South Africa.

"Rainfall patterns have become unpredictable," said a teacher who asked not to be named. "Some seasons pass without proper planting. People here are exhausted and financially stretched."

With no reliable support from their parents, the two children now rely almost entirely on the school feeding programme for food. They receive porridge at school and occasionally take a portion home for supper. Teachers say this has become common for children in similar circumstances.

Picture AI generated to protect children 's identity

"One can see the pressure these children carry," another teacher said. "When they take leftovers home, it's not just to save food, it's because there is nothing else waiting for them."

Staff members have created an informal support system, contributing small amounts of money each month to buy essentials such as soap, exercise books, and, when possible, used uniforms.

"We are doing what we can," said a senior educator. "Climate change and poverty are creating new kinds of vulnerability, and schools are quietly becoming safety nets."

Rural communities in Matabeleland North remain among the worst affected by erratic rainfall and high temperatures. Agricultural officers and environmental experts have repeatedly raised concerns about declining crop yields, poor soil moisture retention, and prolonged dry spells.

A local councillor, speaking privately, said the situation has reached worrying levels.

"Families are splitting up because they have no stable income," he said. "Most people leaving for South Africa expect to send money home, but the reality is harder. When they fail to secure work, communication stops — and children are left on their own."

Continuation

Before leaving, the parents of the two minors grew maize, sorghum, and groundnuts. However, in the past few farming cycles, poor rains and pest outbreaks wiped out their efforts. With no other livelihood options available locally, they joined the steady flow of labour migrants crossing the border.

The feeding programme supported by government and development partners has become central to keeping children in school. Early each day, pupils queue for porridge or beans and sadza. Teachers say attendance usually drops sharply in periods when food supplies are delayed.

"For many pupils, this is their only meal," said another teacher. "If the feeding stops, the impact will be devastating"

Despite their circumstances, the two siblings continue attending classes regularly. One is described as quiet and reserved, the other more outspoken. Their teachers say school gives them structure and a sense of normalcy.

A parent-teacher association volunteer added: "We try to help, even though almost every family here is struggling. Whatever small items we can share, we do."

Across Zimbabwe, agencies such as UNICEF have warned that climate-related poverty is driving higher rates of malnutrition, absenteeism, and child neglect. Experts say the country needs stronger long-term adaptation measures — including investment in drought-resistant crops, water harvesting systems, and expanded social protection programmes to prevent rural children from falling deeper into crisis.

A social worker based in Lupane put it plainly: "Climate change is no longer just an environmental issue; it is reshaping family structures and exposing children to risks they are not prepared for."

At sunset, the two siblings return to their small homestead, reheating the little food they carried from school. Their day ends quietly, much like it began, with the routine shaped by survival rather than choice.

"They remain hopeful," said one of their teachers. "It's their determination that keeps us going. Even with so little, they show up at school ready to learn."

Their story mirrors a broader national challenge — one where drought, poverty, and migration intersect to place unprecedented strain on rural children. For now, the school, the community, and their own resilience form the thin line keeping them afloat.

Unpredictable Weather Deepens Farming Challenges for Mpopoma Urban farmers

Tendai Nyambara

Urban farmers in Mpopoma are grappling with increasingly unpredictable rainfall and prolonged dry spells that have disrupted traditional planting calendars. While some have adopted conservation agriculture techniques, most continue relying on conventional methods.

This challenge came into sharp focus at a recent Climate Change Unpacked community meeting held on Wednesday by Matpulse and Zambezi Eco Sprouts, where only 16 out of 50 women reported using the Intwasa/Pfumvudza conservation method. The remaining two-thirds still practise conventional farming to plant maize.

The women cited the labour demands of Intwasa as the primary barrier to wider adoption, noting that the method is strenuous. Dorica Joseph, among the few using the system, said that although it improves yields, it requires significantly more effort.

"I use the Intwasa farming method, and in the past years I have managed to get a better harvest despite erratic rains, but the method is physically demanding," she said.

Another resident who relies on the intwasa added that the workload associated with Intwasa discourages many women who are already stretched by household responsibilities and ongoing water challenges. Farmers at the meeting described how increasingly unpredictable weather patterns have shaken their confidence in traditional planting knowledge.

"The weather patterns are no longer predictable. The rains are erratic and the heat is now intense," said Joseph.

"We can no longer determine the planting season using traditional knowledge such as imbolisamahlanga (early transitional spring rains), which would first rot maize stalks before we planted. There is no longer any certainty of rain. Once it rains, we quickly plant our maize. This has resulted in us losing seeds and sometimes having to plant twice. Because farming is now a gamble, we plant half of the garden first, monitor, and plant the other half later," Joseph noted.

Duduzile Sibanda expressed concern about the collapse of seasonal order. "When we were growing up, we used to sing about summer, autumn, winter, spring but now it's no longer following that order. You cannot even tell when summer begins or when winter ends. This confusion has cascaded to us being confused about the farming season. We no longer know when to plant maize and when not," she said.

Sikhangenzile Sibanda added that inconsistent rainfall and intense heat have forced repeated planting. "Sometimes the maize germinates and its scorched by the sun or there is too much rain and it floods the field. We end up losing the crops and planting the same field twice or even thrice in one season," she said.

Despite slow uptake, gradual shifts are emerging. Another resident, Julia Ndlovu, said she experimented by dividing her field in two planting one section using Intwasa and the other using conventional methods.

Continuation

"I subdivided my land last year, one side I planted using Intwasa and the other I used the conventional method. The Intwasa side outperformed the conventional side, yielding enough maize to eat and surplus for maize meal," she said.

Several women also explained that they practise mixed farming to buffer against losses, planting crops such as sweet potatoes, beans, butternut and sugar cane alongside maize.

Elizabeth Phiri shared complementary climate-smart practices, including the indigenous "three sisters" system. "For urban resilient farming try intercropping maize, beans and squash. It helps you improve soil fertility and conserve water.

"You can also practise conservation farming by using all crop residues and cut weeds as 'chop and drop' mulch instead of burning them. This helps maintain soil moisture and builds organic matter. If you face flooding, create raised ridges to ensure proper drainage and prevent waterlogging, but for drought resilience, make effort to adopt gatshompo," said Phiri.

Jacqueline Ndlovu used the platform to remind residents of Bulawayo City Council's urban agriculture bylaws. "Some of us plant in illegal areas where the city council does not permit us," said Ndlovu.

"It is important that we follow the City of Bulawayo's urban agriculture bylaws. We must not cause environmental damage, pollution or degradation in the process of carrying out urban farming within the municipal area."

"Farming in wetlands, along streams or in undesignated areas is prohibited to prevent flooding, pollution and safety risks," added Ndlovu.

The meeting concluded with Phathisani Vundla of Zambezi Eco Sprouts demonstrating his low-cost aeroponic system, built from recycled plastic bottles, which grows leafy vegetables using 90–95% less water than traditional soil-based methods. In water stressed Bulawayo where many areas receive piped water only two days a week, the innovation generated immediate interest.

"Sitting at home unemployed, I developed an aeroponic system using discarded plastic bottles. This soil-less farming method uses 90–95% less water, which reduces stress and supports food security in a water-scarce city like Bulawayo. I now grow up to 2,000 heads of lettuce and 400 heads of spinach at a time, earning a steady income.

"I source organic manure for my plants from neighbours who give me chicken and rabbit manure, so basically I rely on local resources. You can join me too and generate an income for yourself and ensure food security for our community," he said.

The women expressed strong interest in joining Vundla's "100 000 Bottle Journey," which encourages residents to collect discarded plastic bottles and set up their own aeroponic systems. Vundla committed to hosting a "look-and-learn" session to help women integrate the technology into their backyard gardens.

YOUNG INNOVATORS & SUSTAINABLE SOLUTIONS

Youth-led responses to climate change, unemployment, and waste

This section highlights young people reimagining waste, food systems, and livelihoods through innovation and creativity.

1. **Green Thumb Meets Grit: Bulawayo Youth's Eco-Innovation Tackles Unemployment, Waste, and Drought.** By Jabulile Siwela

2. **Award-Winning Innovator Sukoluhle Ndebele Transforms Food Waste into Opportunity.** By Loraine Phiri

3. **Turning Trash to Treasure: The 19-Year-Old Sculpting Zimbabwe's Green Future.** By Tendai Nyambara

4. **Deep Plough Converts Pumula North Dumpsite into Climate-Adaptation Drying Hub.** By Providence Moyo

Green Thumb Meets Grit: Bulawayo Youth's Eco-Innovation Tackles Unemployment, Waste and Drought

Jabulile Siwela

Zimbabwe's soaring unemployment rates have left many young people grappling with despair, poverty, and drug abuse. But in Bulawayo's Sizinda suburb, 34 year-old Phathisani Vundla has turned hopelessness into innovation. Vundla, a creative and determined youth, is proving that climate challenges and unemployment can spark opportunity if met with courage and vision.

The effects of climate change are increasingly visible across Zimbabwe reduced rainfall, heatwaves, and recurrent El Niño–induced droughts have devastated traditional rain-fed agriculture. Faced with these realities, Phathisani decided to rethink farming. Instead of waiting for rain, he turned to climate-smart, technology-driven agriculture.

"I am the founder of Zambezi Eco Sprouts, an eco-innovation start-up turning waste plastic bottles into smart, organic aeroponic farming systems," said Phathisani in an interview with Matpulse.

What began as a desperate search for employment soon became a powerful movement for environmental sustainability. With plastic waste piling up in his community and food insecurity on the rise, Phathisani saw an opportunity to solve two problems at once.

"I was motivated by several problems," he explained. "Being unemployed without capital I kept seeing in my community plastic waste piling up everywhere and rising food insecurity.

Phathisani Vundla showing his aeroponic system

I realized that instead of complaining, I could merge these two challenges into one solution. I wanted to prove that technology and sustainability don't have to be expensive concepts, they can start from the ground up, even from a discarded bottle. That belief gave birth to Zambezi Eco Sprouts, where we literally grow food from waste."

Phathisani's aeroponic farming systems, made from recycled food-grade PET bottles, use nutrient-rich mist to grow crops without soil. Powered by solar energy, the systems are both affordable and sustainable. Each setup not only helps reduce plastic pollution but also produces fresh, chemical-free vegetables using a fraction of the water and space required by traditional farming. The semi-closed design minimizes water loss and nutrient runoff problems common in conventional agriculture.

"Our project promotes a food-secure nation by using solar-powered organic aeroponic farming to produce fresh, healthy food with minimal land, water, and resources," said Vundla. "By repurposing plastic waste into productive growing systems, we tackle pollution while creating affordable food solutions for both urban and rural communities. This approach builds climate resilience, reduces import dependence, and increases local food availability, turning waste into opportunity and ensuring nutritious food for all. All genders, ages, and people in different locations can use this system."

Continuation

Starting a business in Zimbabwe's volatile economy is no easy task. Inflation, limited access to capital, and bureaucratic hurdles make entrepreneurship a steep climb. Yet Phathisani's grit and community spirit have kept him going.

"It was pure grit and determination," he said. "Seeking advice from industry experts and reading materials. The project is not a solo journey the input from the community has been invaluable in making the project a success."

That community-driven approach is paying off. Phathisani is not just cultivating crops; he is mentoring and empowering other youths to be self-sustainable and united in the collective effort to combat climate change.

"I have sold three systems and am now working on my fourth system. I have also mentored four youths who are now designing their own systems. Using the aeroponic farming system, I have harvested over 2,000 heads of lettuce and 800 spinach plants feeding my family and selling to the community," he said.

For Phathisani, every plastic bottle tells a story of waste turned into worth, and of climate change met with creativity. "Every bottle repurposed is a bottle diverted from waterways, landfills, and animal habitats," he said. "Every system is a story of hope that climate change is real, and we can all be part of the solution in different ways."

As Zimbabwe faces a future of uncertain rainfall and growing food insecurity, innovators like Vundla are lighting the path forward. With his blend of environmental awareness, entrepreneurship, and community empowerment, he is proving that the green revolution can start right at home even with a single discarded bottle.

Award-Winning Innovator Sukoluhle Ndebele Transforms Food Waste into Opportunity

Loraine Phiri

With Zimbabwe increasingly facing unpredictable rains and severe droughts, a young innovator, Sukoluhle Ndebele is proving that the most effective climate solutions can start locally. Ndebele, founder of USIKO Dried Fruits, is tackling the massive problem of post-harvest food waste a major driver of global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by transforming seasonal fruit into climate-smart, nutritious snacks.

Ndebele's innovative approach recently earned her the Hivos Urban Futures Project Agriwomen Connect "Leading Woman in Value Addition and Processing" award. She views the recognition as a vital affirmation of her mission to address food loss, empower farmers, and provide sustainable, healthy alternatives.

"This recognition is a meaningful affirmation of the hard work and dedication that have gone into building USIKO Dried Fruits," Ndebele said. "Personally, it motivates me to keep growing and pushing forward. For USIKO, it marks a powerful step in our journey; highlighting our commitment to reducing food waste, empowering local farmers, and providing healthy natural snacks."

USIKO was born from a simple but pressing climate challenge, food waste. While taking a Green Skills course, Ndebele discovered how much fruit never reaches consumers due to poor storage, long transport chains, and lack of processing infrastructure.

Sukoluhle Ndebele

"I was shocked by how short the lifespan of most fresh fruits is, and how much ends up wasted," she recalls. "USIKO was born from the desire to save food, support farmers, and provide communities with sustainable, wholesome snacks that nourish the body and respect the planet."

Ndebele identifies food waste as an "invisible" driver of emissions. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) estimates that 30% to 40% of perishable items like fruits and vegetables is lost in developing countries' value chain due to factors like poor storage, lack of modern logistics, and inefficient transport systems.

"Food waste is a major, but often invisible, driver of greenhouse-gas emissions, and in Zimbabwe's fruit value chain the problem is very real," Ndebele explained. "When you add in losses in the field, during transport, handling, and processing, that number can go up to 40 %."

USIKO's core operation turns perishable fresh fruit into dried fruit, extending its shelf life from days to months. This value-addition process ensures more of the harvest is utilized and less is left to rot, significantly reducing the GHG emissions associated with decomposition.

"At USIKO, we contribute the little that we can by turning fresh fruit into dried fruit, we are directly reducing food waste," Ndebele stated. "We take produce that might otherwise spoil and give it a longer shelf life. That means more of what farmers grow actually gets used, and less is left to rot."

Continuation

Ndebele wants communities to recognize that food waste is more than just discarded garbage. “One thing I really want communities to understand is that ‘waste’ is not just garbage it is lost food, lost effort, lost nutrition, lost income,” she stressed. “What looks like ‘just food’ to many of us is actually a huge resource. By preserving even, a fraction of that fruit, we can make a big difference for families, for farmers, and for the climate.”

Smallholder farmers, who constitute the majority of Zimbabwe’s agricultural producers, remain on the frontline of climate change as unpredictable rains and recurring droughts make harvests increasingly uncertain. “Smallholder farmers are at the frontline of climate change; unpredictable rains and droughts make harvests uncertain,” Ndebele explained. Through USIKO, her team works directly with these farmers by purchasing their fruit for value addition. This reduces waste and provides a stable market, supporting income even in difficult seasons. “At USIKO, we work closely with them to help build resilience,” she added.

The company also promotes long-term adaptation strategies such as seed conservation and the adoption of grafted trees, which offer healthier, more productive, and disease-resistant harvests. In its processing, USIKO blends traditional African preservation techniques such as sun-drying with modern equipment and packaging. Ndebele noted that this approach “allows us to celebrate our cultural heritage while delivering high-quality products that meet today’s standards.”

As a young woman entrepreneur working in climate and food systems, Ndebele has faced scepticism. She describes navigating personal and external doubt as her biggest hurdle.

As Zimbabwe faces a future of uncertain rainfall and growing food insecurity, innovators like Vundla are lighting the path forward. With his blend of environmental awareness, entrepreneurship, and community empowerment, he is proving that the green revolution can start right at home even with a single discarded bottle.

“The biggest challenge has been navigating doubt,” she shared. “Being a young woman in the climate and food systems space, I’ve often faced scepticism. People question your ideas, your experience, and sometimes even your right to lead. Convincing others to believe in your vision, to invest in it, or to trust that it can work is incredibly hard.”

However, the purpose behind the work keeps her going.

“What has kept me going is the bigger picture; the farmers whose produce I can help preserve, the communities that gain access to nutritious food, and the knowledge that my work can create real change,” Ndebele said. “I remind myself that persistence, passion, and purpose can turn doubt into determination. Every small success, every life impacted, makes the tears, the long nights, and the challenges worth it.”

Continuation

For young people passionate about climate-smart entrepreneurship, Ndebele encourages boldness, resilience, and starting with available resources. “Innovation does not wait for perfect conditions; it begins with courage, persistence, and the willingness to learn from every setback,” she advised.

“I dream of USIKO growing into a globally recognized brand that remains deeply rooted in Zimbabwean authenticity and sustainability,” Ndebele expressed. Her long-term hope is for USIKO to contribute to restoring Zimbabwe’s reputation as the “bread basket of Africa” while inspiring climate-friendly food systems across the continent.

Ndebele encourages communities to support local farmers and sustainable snacking through USIKO’s range of dried products, which include bananas, apples, pineapples, mixed fruits, mangoes, and peaches (coming soon). Products are available in 35g at $1 and 100g at $4.

“Our dried fruits are perfect to enjoy on their own or used in baking and cooking for natural sweetness,” she said, adding that USIKO gift boxes offer a thoughtful and sustainable option for the holidays.

Turning Trash to Treasure: The 19-Year-Old Sculpting Zimbabwe's Green Future.

Tendai Nyambara

At just 19 years old, Bhekumuzi Mathe of Pumula, Bulawayo, is helping reshape how his community understands and tackles waste. A waste expert and creative artist with Dynamic Waste Management, Mathe is using innovation and artistry to confront one of Zimbabwe's fastest-growing environmental threats: plastic pollution.

By transforming discarded plastics into striking sculptures and functional household items, he is demonstrating how climate challenges can be met with creativity, local solutions, and youth-driven action.

Zimbabwe, like many countries, faces mounting plastic waste due to rapid urbanization, limited recycling infrastructure, and inadequate waste management systems. According to Veritas, the Environmental Management Agency (EMA) states that over 300,000 tonnes of plastic waste are generated annually in Zimbabwe, but less than 10 percent is recycled. Most of the waste ends up in open dumpsites, rivers, and burn pits—releasing greenhouse gases and toxic fumes that worsen climate change and threaten public health.

Mathe's work is a direct response to this escalating crisis. "I was inspired by the growing plastic pollution in my community and the lack of awareness," he explains. "I wanted to be part of the solution, not just the complaint."

Dynamic Waste Management operates on a simple but effective recycling model rooted in community participation. The process begins with collecting different types of plastic from dumpsites, local homes, and community clean-ups. "We start by collecting different types of plastic waste, then we sort, wash, and crush them into smaller pieces using our crusher machine," Mathe says.

The crushed materials are carefully selected based on their properties—such as the flexibility of Linear Low-Density Polyethylene (LLD) or the bright colours of High-Density Polyethylene (HDPE) and Polypropylene (PP). These pieces are then melted and moulded into new forms. The resulting catalogue ranges from practical home products like interlocking bricks and pavers to elaborate, decorative sculptures.

Mathe's artistic process is intentionally rooted in his environmental mission. His colour choices greens, blues, and earthy tones are intentionally drawn from nature, reflecting "the beauty of environment that plastic pollution destroys." The result is artwork that highlights both the fragility and resilience of the natural world serving as a powerful visual call for environmental action.

The journey is not without hurdles. Mathe notes that sorting and cleaning contaminated plastics is labour-intensive, and access to advanced machinery remains limited. Yet these constraints have not derailed the project.

Continuation

"I overcome these challenges through teamwork, community involvement, and creativity," Mathe says. This approach turns limitations into opportunities for innovative design, ensuring the operation continues to scale.

By actively engaging community members, Dynamic Waste Management has turned waste collection into a shared responsibility. This collaboration has the double benefit of reducing pollution and building environmental awareness at household level.

Mathe believes art is not just decorative it is a critical catalyst for sustainability awareness. "Art has the power to reach hearts. It's a universal language that can influence behaviour and inspire action," he says. The impact is visible. According to Mathe, community members who once dumped or burned plastic now bring it directly to the recycling centre. "Our community now brings plastic waste to us instead of burning or dumping it, showing real behaviour change."

Dynamic Waste Management tracks progress through the volume of plastic collected and recycled each month, an indicator of how local solutions can feed into broader climate mitigation efforts. By reducing the amount of plastic that ends up in landfills or is burned, the initiative helps cut emissions and encourages a circular economy in which waste becomes a resource rather than a burden.

Looking ahead, Mathe and his team plan to expand their operations and deepen their community outreach.

"We are working on expanding our recycling center to process more waste, start youth training programs in creative recycling, and launch educational workshops across schools in Bulawayo and Zimbabwe," Mathe explains. These future programs aim to equip young people with skills in eco-art, recycling, and environmental stewardship, ensuring the next generation is better prepared to face climate challenges.

For those wondering how to reduce their own environmental footprint, Mathe advises beginning with what is already within reach. "Start small. Reuse what you already have. Look around your home before throwing anything away, think of how it can be redesigned. Creativity does not need big tools, only a strong will to make change."

He encourages people to adopt simple daily habits like carrying reusable bags and bottles, avoiding single-use plastics, and supporting local initiatives like Dynamic Waste Management.

"When people see beauty and value coming from waste, they begin to rethink how they handle their own," Bhekumuzi Mathe concludes. "My goal is to show that sustainability is not just for experts; it starts with individual creativity and responsibility. Together, we can build a greener and cleaner Zimbabwe."

Deep Plough Converts Pumula North Dumpsite into Climate-Adaptation Drying Hub

Providence Moyo

Deep Plough, a youth-led agricultural collective in Bulawayo, is establishing a high-capacity produce-drying hub through the conversion of a previously neglected dumpsite in Pumula North. The initiative addresses climate-related challenges to food security by pioneering a value-chain response that integrates urban youth training, urban farming innovation, and community resilience.

The former dumpsite in Pumula North has undergone significant physical transformation. What was described as a sprawling mound of waste, leachate, and rusting debris is now a facility marked by new signage: "Deep Plough Youth Drying Centre." Support from Hauling Quarry, facilitated the use of heavy machinery to level the ground, install drainage, and prepare drying beds and clean platforms for produce processing. The site, previously used by waste trucks, is now utilized to prepare and dry high-value perishable produce, such as mushrooms, bananas, and oranges, under the sun.

In an interview with Matebeleland Pulse, Deep Plough chairperson Muziwanele Ncube said the decision to repurpose the dumping site was strategic.

"We knew that climate change was shrinking land availability and increasing post-harvest losses. Farmers were watching crops rot, trucks were struggling with spoilage, and youth were losing interest in agriculture because the value chain simply broke."

The drying center serves three primary functions, according to Ncube to provide a secure space for the sorting and sun/low-heat drying of high-value crops. Train urban youth in value-addition techniques. and reconnect the produce chain to markets to mitigate waste and improve incomes.

Bulawayo and surrounding regions face acute water scarcity driven by erratic rainfall, extended dry spells, and unreliable boreholes. These conditions have reduced agricultural productivity and worsened food insecurity, particularly for smallholder farmers who often lack access to necessary storage, drying, and processing facilities. Reports indicate that post-harvest losses for certain perishables in the region can reach up to 30%.

Deep Plough's strategy is based on the premise that increasing production alone is insufficient for climate adaptation. Ncube observed: "Yes, we need more crops; yes, we need more land but if we don't address how those crops are stored, processed and marketed, the cycle of loss continues."

The drying hub directly counters post-harvest losses by extending the shelf-life of short-life produce (e.g., mushrooms, bananas, oranges) through dehydration. This process increases the value of the goods and enhances the potential for youth engagement.

The project aims to re-engineer the perception of agriculture among urban youth, who often view it as low-income and dependent on unpredictable rainfall. Deep Plough is recruiting and training young people to operate beyond planting and harvesting, focusing on roles in processing, packaging, marketing, and entrepreneurship

Continuation

The initiative includes a two-tier training program with hands-on instruction at the drying center. The curriculum covers the technical skills required for drying, including rinsing, slicing, blanching, temperature control, storage, and hygienic packaging for produce such as mushrooms, bananas, apples, and oranges.

"The aim," says Ncube, "is that climate adaptation becomes a pathway for youth entrepreneurship. They don't just respond to climate stress they build businesses out of it."

Accountability metrics for the project include tracking the number of youth trained, the kilograms of produce processed, the market linkages established, and the revenue generated from dried products.

The conversion of the dumpsite received backing from local councillors and community leaders, who favored a clean, productive facility over a derelict waste tip. Smallholder farmers and peri-urban gardeners in the Bulawayo area are currently supplying produce. Items that might otherwise have been discarded due to shape, size, or short shelf-life are now collected, processed, and sold by Deep Plough.

- **Mushrooms**, which have a short shelf-life, are dried and packaged in resealable packs.
- **Bananas** are processed into chips or banana-flour blends.
- **Oranges and apples** are dehydrated for snacks or ingredients for local baking and teas.

This value-addition increases the final product's shelf-life, enables access to new market channels (including regional and online sales), and provides supplementary income.

The project also adheres to principles of environmental responsibility: organic waste from drying (peels, cores) is incorporated into composting systems, and water is recycled or captured in low-tech catchments, modeling a circular economy approach.

The initiative currently faces operational challenges, including the need for reliable electricity to power drying racks during overcast periods, difficulties in sourcing packaging materials, and hurdles in accessing premium markets. Securing long-term finance for scaling operations also remains a concern. Despite these obstacles, Deep Plough expresses confidence in the model's replicability. Looking ahead, the collective plans to launch a branded line of dried Bulawayo produce and explore export channels within Southern Africa. They also aim to collaborate with the City Council and climate-finance programs to establish youth-owned "agri-pods"—mini drying hubs in other suburbs—digitally linked to the main centre.

Deep Plough's drying hub addresses the convergence of climate change, water scarcity, and youth unemployment by enhancing food security through effective resource utilization and value-chain development. The project transforms a former waste site into a productive asset, providing a tangible model for climate adaptation and youth-driven economic engagement in Bulawayo.

As Ncube concludes, the approach was to turn existing crises into operational inputs: "We realised that doing the same thing and expecting a different result was no longer an option. Instead, we turned the problem inside-out: drought, youth unemployment, value-chain losses—what if we made them our inputs?"

The Pumula North drying center is currently operational, focusing on training, processing, and establishing market links. Its long-term significance will depend on its ability to scale and sustain momentum

WASTE, ART, & CREATIVE CLIMATE ACTION

Using art and creativity to reimagine waste and climate communication

These stories explore how art and innovation are transforming waste into tools for climate awareness and economic opportunity.

1. **Bulawayo Youth Turns Waste Food into Agri-Art Masterpieces to Tackle Climate Change**. By Providence Moyo

2. B**ulawayo Artist Turns Discarded Glass into Eco-Friendly Masterpieces**. By Sharon Muchara

Bulawayo Artist Turns Discarded Glass into Eco-Friendly Masterpieces

Sharon Muchara

In Bulawayo, 30-year-old artist Mandisa Nozinhle Nyoni is proving that one person's trash is another's artistic treasure and a tool for climate action. What most people discard without a second thought, Mandisa transforms into intricate works of art.

By meticulously collecting broken bottles and shattered windowpanes, she has not only built a growing career but is also quietly tackling one of Zimbabwe's persistent environmental challenges, glass waste.

Her journey began in 2020 during the COVID-19 lockdown, a period of global uncertainty that sparked unexpected creativity. "I started creating upcycled glass art in 2020 during the COVID lockdown," Mandisa says. A Pinterest image of a ballerina made from broken mirrors provided the inspiration that pushed her to experiment with something new.

Zimbabwe generates significant solid waste, and glass which does not biodegrade. Glass waste remains one of the most problematic materials to manage. Mandisa's work offers a small but meaningful intervention. Every month she collects around 50 discarded bottles and up to 30 window cut-offs from around her community. She cleans, cuts, shapes, and assembles them into detailed wildlife portraits, abstract designs, and increasingly, human figures.

"It can be broken windows, beer bottles, broken water glasses, that is what I use," she explains. Her process is meticulous and, at times, risky. "My first attempts were not easy; I would cut myself here and there. But now I have improved, learning new techniques with each piece."

For Mandisa, the act of collecting is just as important as the final artwork. "Picking up bottles and glasses from the streets is also my way of contributing to a clean, healthy environment," she says. By removing waste from public spaces, she plays a part in reducing pollution and raising awareness about responsible disposal.

"Mandisa's love for art stretches back to childhood she began drawing at the age of five. But upcycled glass art opened new creative horizons. "I have always loved art," she says, "and this medium is something fresh compared to the usual canvas or sculpting."

Wildlife remains her biggest creative muse. "I love wildlife animals, so they inspire most of my creations," she says. But recently, she has begun venturing into portraiture. "I am now interested in making people portraits, trying to capture human expressions and emotions."

Continuation

The reaction from the public has been overwhelmingly positive. "Seeing people's amazement when they see my work for the first time and them being shocked that it's glass," she says, is one of her greatest motivations.

Since she began, Mandisa has sold more than 100 pieces, mostly to art lovers who appreciate authenticity and environmental consciousness. "My customers are people who love art… people who are eco-conscious," she notes. She markets her work through Instagram, TikTok, and WhatsApp, building a growing digital presence.

Her success highlights the economic potential tied to waste a message she hopes young people will embrace. "The youth can use waste, which is easily accessible from anywhere, to make art… They can create for themselves a source of income," she says.

Through her work, she has seen people's perceptions shift. "Through my work people now see the different possibilities of waste," she notes, although she still collects all her materials herself.

As climate change intensifies local challenges, from extreme heat to shifting rainfall patterns, Mandisa believes communities must step forward. "We all have a role in saving our planet," she emphasizes.

Her hopes for the future reach far beyond her studio. "I would love to see a cleaner Zimbabwe, a country whose people hate littering and are eco-conscious," she says. She wants young people to recognize opportunity in the things society throws away. "It does not necessarily have to be art, it can be anything, from bags to shoes to accessories or clothing. The possibilities are endless."

Through her glass art, Mandisa is not only creating beauty from waste she is demonstrating how small, local actions can also contribute to a cleaner environment, spark new livelihoods, and inspire a culture of environmental responsibility.

Youth Turns Waste Food into Agri-Art Masterpieces to Tackle Climate Change

Providence Moyo

A 20-year-old Bulawayo creative, Bongani Mandizvidza, is turning food waste into a powerful tool for climate education through an innovative initiative he calls Agri-Art.

Using discarded cereal grains such as sorghum, crushed maize, and groundnuts, Bongani creates striking visual artworks that highlight environmental challenges while empowering young people to take climate action.

What began as a passion project during a climate training workshop has evolved into a growing movement that fuses creativity, agriculture, and sustainability. Bongani's artworks not only captivate audiences but also spark vital conversations about food waste, recycling, and climate resilience.

"In most markets, damaged or unsellable grains are thrown away," says Bongani. "I saw an opportunity to repurpose them into something that tells a story about the planet, hunger, and solutions."

Using A4 bond paper, glue, brushes, and dried food waste, Bongani creates murals and portraits that depict scenes of climate justice, food sovereignty, and African resilience. His work is often showcased at community centers, schools, and local climate forums.

As the Agri-Foods systems lead under the Climate Change Youths Committee of Urban Futures in Bulawayo, Bongani has attended workshops with local youths teaching them both the techniques of Agri-Art and the environmental messages behind it.

"It's not just about making beautiful pieces, it is about educating our communities, especially young people, on how we can turn problems into possibilities," he says.

"These sessions are low-cost and highly interactive, promoting the circular economy model of "make, use and reuse." Participants leave not only with a piece of art but also a new perspective on sustainability and innovation.

His message is especially relevant in Zimbabwe, where climate change has exacerbated food insecurity and disrupted traditional farming practices. Bongani believes young people are uniquely positioned to drive grassroots climate action.

Continuation

Bongani hopes to scale his project into a citywide campaign, establishing mobile Agri-Art exhibitions and securing funding for materials and training kits. He also envisions partnering with schools to integrate Agri-Art into environmental education curricula.

"In a world full of waste, we can choose to create," he says. "Agri-Art is my way of turning something discarded into something valuable for the planet and for the people."

As climate threats intensify, voices like Bongani's remind us that creativity, when paired with purpose, can be a powerful tool for change. Through grains and glue, this young artist is planting seeds of awareness, one artwork at a time.

Climate-Smart Agriculture & Resilience

Adapting farming systems to a changing climate

This section focus on focus on resilience, adaptation strategies, and climate-smart farming practices.

Beyond Soil and Seed: Mimi Matobo's Playbook for Climate Resilience in Zimbabwean Farming. By Loraine Phiri

Water harvesting key to resilience as farmers face unpredictable 2025–2026 season. By Nqobizwe Thebe

Credit: Mimi Matobo

Beyond Soil and Seed: Mimi Matobo's Playbook for Climate Resilience in Zimbabwean Farming

Loraine Phiri

In the rural district of Umguza, just outside Bulawayo, 30-year-old farmer Luzibo "Mimi" Matobo has learned that farming today is not just about soil, seed, water, and sunshine it is about resilience. On a five-acre plot, Matobo grows a variety of vegetables, balancing the demands of the land with the unpredictable realities of a changing climate.

"Climate change has definitely affected me from my choice in crops at particular times of the year to the active portion of my land," Matobo said. "I am limited to the amount of water I have access to, so not all of the land is continuously in use. This affects my income, which then affects the entire farming process as well."

Matobo's journey into full-time farming began almost a decade ago. "Initially when I started farming, I was what they call a 'cell phone farmer,'" she explained. "I was working my corporate job, sending seeds, instructing from a distance. Eventually, I made the decision to farm full-time."

Though farming runs in her family, it was not her first career choice. "When I went to school, I studied psychology and history. I had no intention of being a farmer at least not as young as I am. But when I lived abroad, things changed, and I realized I had a home and land waiting for me. I fast-tracked my retirement plan and actively started doing what I had silently been doing, farming."

For Matobo, the shifting climate in Zimbabwe has forced innovation and creativity. Her approach is practical and rooted in experimentation.

"In my experience, the best way to overcome climate change challenges is to do what you can with what you have. Adapt quickly and always be willing to learn," she said. Her strategies include choosing drought-resistant seed varieties, matching crops to seasonal temperatures, and experimenting on small plots before expanding production.

"I will try something like radish, which is not common here I plant one or two lines to see how it reacts in my environment," she added. "That way, I get a realistic outlook before planting on a larger scale."

Water access remains one of her biggest challenges. With no access to river water yet, Matobo relies on rainwater and heavily on borehole water, which she estimates makes up "about 98%" of her irrigation during this time of the year. Depending on costs and terrain, she alternates between drip irrigation and sprinklers, while encouraging resource-sharing among other farmers in Umguza.

Continuation

Despite her embrace of modern farming methods, Matobo still values traditional knowledge. "When growing maize, we use the 'three sisters' method planting maize, butternut, and green beans together. The beans fix nitrogen in the soil, the butternut's broad leaves retain moisture and suppress weeds, and the maize provides the tall stalks for the beans to climb," she said. "It's something my grandmother used, and I still practice it sometimes."

She also uses shade cloths to moderate temperature and protect crops from excessive sun, ridges to improve drainage and prevent waterlogging, and mulching to conserve soil moisture and regulate soil temperature. "Being familiar with how each crop reacts is critical," she said. "For example, while I use mulching to retain moisture, our area has a lot of termites, so with some crops it doesn't work as effectively as it does with others."

Matobo believes that farming is a constant learning process. "With farming, you learn from your mistakes every day. You pay your fees every day," she added. "That's why it is important to research, experiment, and make informed decisions."

Matobo's work often brings her into contact with older farmers, and she approaches those interactions with respect and a touch of confidence.

"When I get the opportunity to teach the elders, I simply say, 'The proof of the pudding is in the eating. Let me do it my way. If I fail, you will be right. But if I succeed, you will have a good harvest to look forward to," she said with a laugh. "When I put my integrity on the line, that usually gets a better response."

For younger or aspiring farmers, Matobo's advice is simple but profound: "Run your own race," she said. "We learn from others, yes, but your journey is your own. Farming teaches you something new every day. Be willing to learn, adapt, ask others, and use the internet. There is no single right or wrong way just the way that works for you."

When asked what she would tell someone in the city about how climate change is affecting their food and families, Matobo didn't hesitate.

"Climate change affects everyone even those who do not farm," she said. "What happens in the field determines what ends up on your plate. Droughts, heatwaves, and unpredictable rains reduce yields and make it harder for farmers to grow enough healthy food. That's why food prices go up, and why the quality of food can suffer."

But Matobo believes the issue goes beyond the weather. "People must invest in understanding what goes into their food," she urged. "When consumers demand cheap food, someone along the value chain is forced to cut corners. It might be the farmer using too much fertilizer, or the supplier choosing speed over quality."

As an organic farmer in Umguza, she remains passionate about producing food the right way, even when it's not easy. "It's difficult to make the market understand that my vegetables won't grow fast or look perfectly shiny because they are organic," she explained. "But they will last longer, even without refrigeration, and they're more resilient because they're naturally grown."

Matobo hopes consumers will begin to value the connection between climate, farming practices, and food quality. "We can take shortcuts and flood crops with chemicals to meet demand, but that's not sustainable," she said. "As farmers, we have a duty to feed the nation with food that's nutritious and as consumers, people have a duty to appreciate what that really takes."

Water harvesting key to resilience as farmers face unpredictable 2025–2026 season

Nqobizwe Thebe

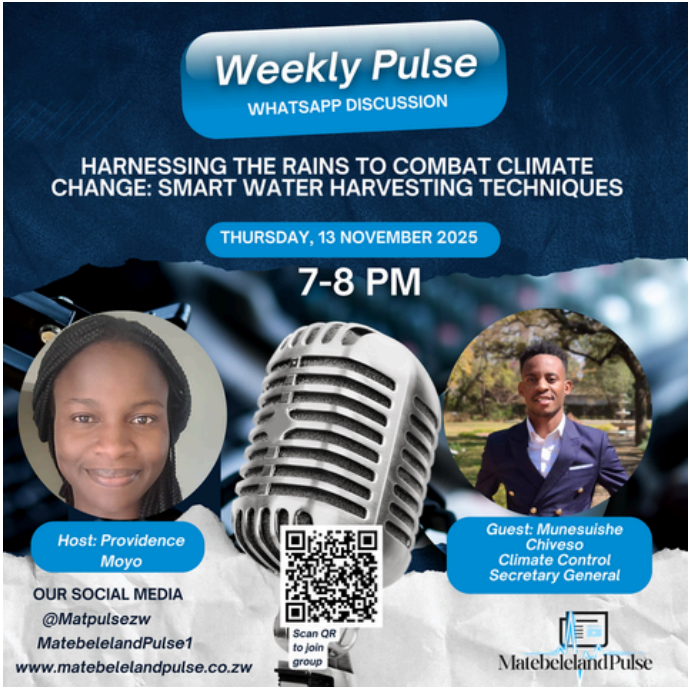
Zimbabwean farmers and urban residents have been urged to adopt water harvesting practices to strengthen resilience against recurring water shortages and adapt to increasingly unpredictable climate pattern.

This call came out during a recent Weekly Pulse WhatsApp discussion titled "Harnessing the Rains to Combat Climate Change: Smart Water Harvesting Techniques," hosted by Matpulse. The session featured Munesuishe Chiveso, Secretary General and Co-founder for Climate Control. The conversation highlighted the critical paradox that despite current national dam levels being high, access to water remains a major constraint for communities.

Chiveso began the discussion by highlighting the gap between national water reserves and household access, particularly in urban areas. "As of late October 2025, Zimbabwe's dams and water reserves were77% full, which is above the usual 64.6% for this time of year," he noted.

However, despite these strong national reserves, infrastructure bottlenecks limit delivery. Chiveso pointed out that water utility services are severely constrained: "For example in Harare, in urban areas, ZINWA is pumping 400 megalitres a day against the 1,200 megalitres required, leaving residents, especially farmers, to rely heavily on rainwater."

Given this reliance, water harvesting defined as "catching and saving rainwater from roofs, ground surfaces, or runoff areas so that it can be used during dry periods, "offers a practical and necessary solution as the country prepares for a farming season marked by unpredictable weather.



Chiveso emphasized that for Zimbabwe, water harvesting is not optional but a climate-adaptation necessity. "Water harvesting is part of the country's adaptation strategy. It helps communities survive erratic rains, especially as we enter the 2025–2026 farming season."

He explained the various forms of water harvesting relevant to local communities. These include: Rainwater harvesting, which is collecting roof runoff into tanks or containers. Surface runoff harvesting, which is capturing water that flows across land into small dams, ponds, or check dams. In-field water harvesting, involving techniques such as tied ridges, zai pits, and contour bunds that trap water directly in crop fields. Lastly, groundwater recharge, using soakaway pits and infiltration trenches to restore underground water levels.

These methods, Chiveso noted, are essential for improving soil moisture, reducing erosion, enhancing crop yields, and building community climate resilience. Commonly used local techniques include tied ridges, zai pits, roof water tanks, contour bunds, and small community dams and ponds.

While water harvesting methods are generally cost-effective and environmentally friendly, their successful implementation faces hurdles, mainly concerning labour and geography.

Continuation

Chiveso highlighted that labour intensity is a major barrier, particularly for vulnerable groups. “Many methods (like zai pits or tied ridges) require significant manual labour for digging, shaping ridges, or maintaining structures. Women and the elderly really lag behind in the implementation of some of these techniques that would really require labour like digging,” he explained.

He also pointed out that certain regions, especially those with sandy soils or steep terrain, face structural difficulties, as water-retaining features can collapse or fail without constant reinforcement. “In Matabeleland South and Masvingo, heavy runoff and poor soils make tied ridges less durable unless maintained yearly,” said Chiveso.

To overcome these challenges, he recommended practical solutions focused on community effort and skills development: “To address the barriers one can promote mechanized or group-based digging, e.g., use of ox-drawn ridgers or community labour days. Organisations can also help conduct regular training and demonstrations on correct layout, spacing, and maintenance of ridges/bunds.”

Asked about government interventions, Chiveso highlighted national efforts to promote modern and efficient agriculture. The government has introduced its National Agritech Strategy (2021–2025), designed to promote the use of technology and digital tools in agriculture. He also pointed to the widely known Pfumvudza/Intwasa programme and partnerships with UN agencies and NGOs supporting climate-smart agriculture.

Beyond national policies, Chiveso stressed the crucial role of collective community action .”Communities can enhance water conservation by working together to build and maintain local water harvesting systems such as small dams, ponds, and roof-rainwater tanks… Forming local water committees helps manage and maintain these systems,” he said.

The discussion also touched on urban water management, with Chiveso giving a candid assessment of city drainage systems when asked about collecting pavement runoff:
“In some countries, runoff water is collected and recycled, but in Zimbabwe that’s another story. Our drainage systems are rarely serviced that’s why our cities flood. It’s not heavy rainfall; it’s poor maintenance.”

Chiveso also highlighted the essential participation of young people in driving sustainable water solutions. “Young people are central to innovation. They can create smart irrigation tools, weather apps, low-cost sensors, and lead awareness campaigns. They bridge traditional methods with modern sustainable solutions for water conservation.”

As the rainy season intensifies, Chiveso urged farmers across the country to take initiative. “Let us utilize our knowledge and available local resources to fight the effects of climate change affecting our farming sector. Together, we can go green.”

NGO & CIVIL SOCIETY CLIMATE ACTION

Community-based environmental and climate mitigation efforts

These stories showcase the work of NGOs, grassroots movements, and civil society organisations engaged in climate adaptation, environmental protection, and rights-based advocacy.

1. **Youth and Women at the Frontline of Climate Action in Matabeleland** By Buhlebenkosi Mhlanga
2. **Rocket Stoves Offer Healthier, More Sustainable Cooking in Hwange** By Lungelo Ndhlovu
3. **Wild Africa and Tikobane Trust Launch Innovative WhatsApp Platform to Combat Human-Wildlife Conflict in Makwandara** By Thembelihle Mhlanga
4. **YCA4SoTra Project Awards Five Organizations Seed Grants at Green Jobs Bootcamp.** By Providence Moyo
5. **Bulawayo's Mafakela Taskforce Sets Standard for Grassroots Environmental Action.** By Tendai Nyambara
6. **Voices For Water Petitions Govt to Review Water Privatisation Directive.** By Loraine Phiri

Rocket stoves offer healthier, more sustainable cooking in Hwange

Lungelo Ndlovu

In Hwange District, many households are switching to rocket stoves, a change that is easing pressure on forests, reducing smoke-related illnesses, and saving women long hours spent searching for firewood.

In Sianyanga village, Mabale, Lesina Nkomo explains that the stoves are made using simple, locally available materials.
"We mix soil from anthills, cow dung, and ashes to make the stove," she said. "After moulding, it takes about a month to dry before it's ready for use."

The idea is being promoted by the Soft Foot Alliance, whose creative facilitator, Msungwe Sithole, says the design took years of testing.

"In 2014, Laurie, our boss, tried different designs and materials," Sithole said. "The final version uses clay and animal manure. When the manure burns out, it leaves tiny air pockets in the walls, and that improves insulation. The air enters from underneath the fuel, and only the tips of the sticks burn. The heat then shoots up like a rocket flame to the pot."

Women in the district have been trained to build and sell the stoves. The first models had one cooking plate, but after women requested designs that could cook more than one meal at once, a two-plate version was introduced.

The shift has come at a critical time. Firewood in the region is becoming harder to find, and women are facing increasing risks in their search for fuel.

"In our area, firewood is so scarce that the Forestry Commission allows women to enter protected forests only once a week," Sithole said. "They walk long distances among elephants and buffalo, carry heavy loads on their heads, and lose a whole day to the task. It's tiring and dangerous."

Traditional open fires also fill kitchens with smoke, exposing women and children to harmful air. Rocket stoves burn cleaner and require far less fuel, reducing both health risks and deforestation.

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that around 2.1 billion people still rely on open fires or inefficient stoves. Household air pollution contributes to millions of premature deaths every year, including respiratory illnesses and heart disease. Children under five and women who spend hours cooking are the most affected.

Forestry Commission spokesperson Violet Makoto said clean energy solutions like rocket stoves are an important climate and conservation tool.
"They reduce reliance on wood fuel, which is one of the major drivers of forest loss in Zimbabwe," Makoto said. "They help protect forests and biodiversity, while also supporting communities to adapt to climate change."

With Hwange among the districts already feeling the strain of shifting weather patterns, rocket stoves are proving to be a practical way to help households cook safely without damaging the environment they depend on.

Youth and women at the frontline of climate action in Matabeleland

Buhlebenkosi Mhlanga

Women and youth are emerging as key drivers of climate action in Matabeleland, leading efforts to adapt to worsening droughts and environmental challenges. During this week's Weekly Pulse Discussion, climate advocate and diplomat Nozinhle Evelyn Gumede founder of Mainah Trust and a leading voice in youth-led environmental initiatives, shared insights on community-led adaptation and the growing leadership of women in climate resilience.

Gumede spoke about her journey into climate advocacy, describing how her passion was shaped by a deep personal connection to her community. "Honestly, my journey started from a place of deep love and concern for my community," Gumede said. "I grew up seeing how droughts, erratic rainfall, and hunger affected families, especially women and small farmers in Matabeleland. I remember my grandmother, Mainah Phuti, who worked tirelessly to feed us even when the land was dry. She taught me resilience and compassion, and that became the heartbeat of Mainah Trust, which I founded in her honour."

Founded in 2019, Mainah Trust works with rural communities, women, and youth to promote climate-smart agriculture, renewable energy solutions, and environmental education. Through its programmes, smallholder farmers are trained to adopt sustainable farming practices that improve yields while protecting the environment.

"We have also formed environmental clubs in schools across Bulawayo," Gumede explained. "Young people learn about climate change through hands-on activities. For women, we run workshops that teach both climate adaptation and entrepreneurship, because resilience is also about economic independence. It's been beautiful watching young people and women start their own small eco-projects and seeing communities become more confident in protecting their environment."

Gumede noted that many communities in Matabeleland are creatively responding to the impacts of climate change..

"The biggest challenges are drought, water scarcity, and crop failure," she said. "Many families depend on rain-fed farming, and when the rains do not come, the entire community suffers. We all see this from the backyard gardens we have of chomolia and maize to community gardens and urban farming.

"But what is powerful is how people are adapting. I have seen women form small cooperatives to build water harvesting systems and youth groups starting solar irrigation and tree-planting projects. These may seem like small acts, but they are changing lives and building resilience from the ground up."

Continuation

Gumede emphasized that women are central to climate action yet still face significant barriers. “Women play a critical role in adaptation and green projects, but access to finance and resources remains limited,” she said. “Societal norms and lack of technical training often keep women from leading projects or being part of decision-making.”

She called for inclusive policies and targeted interventions that prioritise women’s access to funding, land, and technology, alongside mentorship and capacity-building initiatives.

. “When women are empowered and supported, they bring innovative, community-centred, and resilient solutions that benefit everyone,” Gumede said. “In Ndebele we say intandane enhle ngumakhothwa ngunina (a child is well cared for by their mother). Women nurture communities and empowering them means empowering the nation.”

In addition to her work with Mainah Trust, Gumede has also served as National Coordinator for Climate Live Zimbabwe, a role she is transitioning out of to focus on Mainah Trust. The initiative uses music and culture to raise awareness on climate change. “Music has a way of reaching people that facts alone cannot,” she noted. “We bring together artists, activists, and youth to spark conversations about climate change. Climate action is not just policy and science it’s also art, culture, and heart.”

For young Zimbabweans eager to act but unsure where to start, Gumede’s advice was practical and encouraging.

“Start small… and start where you are,” she said. “You don’t need a big organisation to make a difference. It can be as simple as planting trees or joining a local clean-up campaign. Connect with others youth networks like YOUNGO or local environmental clubs.”

Gumede’s advocacy extends beyond Zimbabwe. As part of Earth Uprising’s Global Youth Leadership Council, she connects Zimbabwean youth experiences with global climate movements. “I use that space to share stories from rural communities that are often left out of the conversation,” she said. “It’s about making sure the world understands that climate change is not a distant issue it’s happening now in Africa.

Asked about future plans, Gumede said Mainah Trust aims to expand its climate education and youth empowerment programmes to more rural districts. “My legacy, I hope, will be one of empowerment and transformation,” she reflected. “That I helped build a generation of young Zimbabweans who do not wait for change but create it.”

Wild Africa and Tikobane Trust launch innovative whatsapp platform to combat human wildlife conflict in Makwandara

Thembelihle Mhlanga

In an effort to mitigate escalating human-wildlife conflicts in Makwandara village and its environs, Wild Africa, in partnership with Tikobane Trust, has unveiled WhatsApp chatboard platform designed for local communities.

This digital initiative aims to equip villagers with crucial knowledge and real-time guidance on safely managing encounters with problematic animals that frequently disrupt rural livelihoods and threaten both human and wildlife safety.

At the official launch ceremony, Farayi Chapoterera, Country Director for Wild Africa Zimbabwe, emphasized the transformative potential of this mobile technology in fostering coexistence between local people and wildlife. "This WhatsApp platform is not just a communication tool; it is a lifeline for our community," Chapoterera remarked. "By providing automated prompts detailing the behavior and appropriate responses to different wildlife species, we empower our villagers to act intelligently and decisively in moments of conflict."

The chatboard is distinctive in its user-centric design, delivered entirely in isiNdebele, the predominant local language, ensuring accessibility for all villagers regardless of literacy level or technological familiarity. "We recognized that effective conservation solutions must be rooted in local culture and language," explained Chapoterera. "Facilitating understanding in Ndebele respects the community's identity and enhances the practicality of this intervention."

Ndlalende Ncube, Director of Tikobane Trust, applauded the partnership and underlined the platform's anticipated impact not only in Makwandara but also in the surrounding rural areas. "Human-wildlife conflict has long been a bane to our villagers, disrupting their safety, agriculture, and daily lives," Ncube stated. "This initiative represents a milestone in community-driven conservation efforts. The integration of modern technology with grassroots involvement creates a sustainable model for coexistence that other communities can emulate."

Beyond the digital solution, Wild Africa further bolstered the community's ability to deter dangerous animal encounters by donating essential safety equipment during the launch. The package included a Starlink kit solar-lighting system to enhance night-time visibility, reflective jackets for improved personal safety, and vuvuzelas, which serve as an effective noise deterrent against wildlife encroachment. These provisions are expected to fortify the villagers' protective measures, reducing the frequency and severity of wildlife-related incidents.

The introduction of this WhatsApp chat board arrives at a crucial time, as human-wildlife conflict intensifies across Zimbabwe's rural landscapes, fuelled by habitat loss, climate change, and expanding agricultural frontiers.

Continuation

Villagers often face perilous confrontations with elephants, baboons, hyenas, and other species that raid crops and endanger lives, exacerbating socioeconomic hardship.

Chapoterera underscored the importance of knowledge and preparedness in confronting these challenges, urging full utilization of the platform. “Understanding animal behavior is the first step to safeguarding our community,” she asserted. “We call upon every villager to engage actively with the WhatsApp system—ask questions, learn the signals, and disseminate the information. This is a communal tool for communal protection.”

Ncube also highlighted the role that this initiative plays in strengthening broader ecosystem conservation efforts. “When local people are equipped to manage wildlife interactions effectively, it builds mutual respect and reduces retaliatory harm to animals. This project exemplifies how conservation and community well-being go hand in hand.”

Since its rollout, the WhatsApp chat board has garnered optimistic feedback for its intuitive interface and practical content. Villagers report increased confidence in handling wildlife encounters and greater awareness of available support channels.

As these digital and material resources integrate into daily life in Makwandara, the collaboration between Wild Africa and Tikobane Trust offers a hopeful blueprint for mitigating human-wildlife conflict, a persistent challenge threatening environmental sustainability and rural livelihoods throughout Zimbabwe.

The synergy between technology, community empowerment, and traditional knowledge reflects a forward-thinking approach that aligns conservation goals with the urgent needs of vulnerable rural populations.

YCA4SoTra Project Awards Five Organizations Seed Grants at Green Jobs Bootcamp.

Providence Moyo

Five youth organizations were awarded $2500 seed grants each at the three-day, Youth Collective Action for Social Transformation (YCA4SoTra) Green Jobs Bootcamp held at Mavuna Lodge in Bulawayo.

Hosted by the Women's Institute for Leadership Development (WILD) in partnership with Saywhat and Save the Children, with support from the European Union the bootcamp ran under the theme "Launching your innovative green income generating project towards a sustainable future." Its goal was to cultivate eco- conscious leaders equipped to address pressing environmental and socio-economic challenges through innovative, community driven solutions.

The winning organisations Deep Plough, Aquaponics, and Deserve Goat Farmer from Bulawayo, Ukuna from Beitbridge and Fish Value Addition from Binga were selected from 13 competitive pitches from Bulawayo, Binga, Gwanda, Beitbridge and Matobo. The winners will use funds to advance projects focused on environmental sustainability and economic growth.

Knowledge Khumalo, Project Officer for the YCA4SoTra project, emphasised the Green Jobs Boot Camp's mission to empower young Zimbabweans with practical green skills to foster youth-led innovation and entrepreneurship in climate-smart sectors.

"We conduct the Green Jobs Boot Camp to equip youth with the knowledge and skills needed to tackle environmental challenges, create economic opportunities, and contribute to a sustainable future," Khumalo explained.

One of the winners, Wayne Musingwini from Ukuna, expressed excitement about the grant. "This seed grant is going to open new avenues for us as we scale up our ecobrick initiative made up of sand and plastics," Musingwini said.

"We are looking forward to expanding our operations and creating more sustainable building solutions for our community."

Similarly, Muziwanele Ncube, the chairperson of Deep Plough Agriculture Cooperative, also expressed his excitement about the $2,500 seed grant received from the GreenJobs Bootcamp.

"This grant is a significant boost to our project, and we plan to use it to further develop our sustainable agriculture initiatives and help us scale up not only mushroom drying but also to include fruits like mangoes," he said.

Ncube underscored the importance of such funding opportunities for young entrepreneurs and innovators in the green economy sector.

The GreenJobs Bootcamp is part of YCA4SoTra's efforts to foster innovation, entrepreneurship, and job creation in the green economy sector. By supporting these organizations, the initiative is expected to have a positive impact on the local economy and environment.

The recipients are expected to utilize the grants to drive their projects forward, creating a ripple effect of positive change in their communities

Bulawayo's Mafakela Taskforce Sets Standard for Grassroots Environmental Action

Tendai Nyambara

In Bulawayo's Luveve and Gwabalanda communities (Ward 16), the Mafakela Health and Environment Taskforce (MHETF) has emerged as one of the city's most organised and impactful grassroots environmental initiatives.

Formed in February 2022 as a direct response to a public health crisis, the Taskforce is helping to reduce pollution, curb illegal dump sites, and strengthen climate resilience in the area.

The initiative was born from tragedy. MHETF project manager Ishmael Mnkandla recalls how a diarrhoea outbreak hit the community in 2020–2021 after residents consumed contaminated water.

"In 2021, we lost 13 residents after they drank contaminated water and environmental issues were raised," said Mnkandla.

The incident exposed deep sanitation challenges and the vulnerability of communities facing unsafe water and poor waste management. "That tragedy showed us the importance of proper hygiene and the need to promote sanitation and cleanliness in our community," he added.

Rather than waiting for municipal assistance, residents organised themselves. "We realised moving forward we had to be proactive and not wait for assistance," Mnkandla said. "We had to take responsibility, promote environmental cleanliness, and protect the health of our community."

From this resolve, the MHETF was formed a community-led effort focused on reducing environmental hazards that fuel waterborne diseases.

Today, the taskforce has grown into a coordinated network of more than 180 members, most of them women. Their operations follow a structured environmental intervention model designed to keep the community clean, safe, and climate-resilient.

"Our core mission is to maintain a clean, healthy, and safe environment for every resident," Mnkandla said. "We have over 180 active members, and about 80 to 90 percent of them are women. They are the backbone of this initiative. We run monthly, bi-weekly, and even weekly clean-ups in high-risk zones, and we work in schools, clinics, and shopping centres."

The team's activities include: removing plastic and general litter, clearing drainage systems to prevent flooding. Cutting long grass in areas prone to waterlogging and conducting ad hoc clean-ups to support overstretched municipal services. These interventions directly tackle climate-linked vulnerabilities. Blocked drains worsen flash floods, unmanaged waste contributes to disease outbreaks during heatwaves, and overgrown vegetation becomes a hazard during the rainy season. The Taskforce works ahead of crises, mitigating risks before they escalate.

Continuation

Over time, the MHETF has expanded beyond cleaning to strengthen local economic resilience. Through the Integrated Skills Approach (ISA), members now operate small home industries producing floor polish, petroleum jelly, and other household items for income generation.

The organisation has also become a formal player in the recycling value chain. "After receiving training from the Environmental Management Agency on waste separation, EMA linked us to our waste buyer, Skies Recyclers," Mnkandla said.

The Bulawayo City Council recently allocated the group a permanent waste collection centre in Chigumira Business Centre. Here, members bring recyclable materials to be weighed, recorded, and stored before being purchased by Skies Recyclers. "The system now provides a steady income stream for participating residents," he added.

For Mnkandla, the strength of the movement lies in consistent daily actions. **"Every small action we take picking up litter, planting a tree, or teaching others helps our community become stronger against the effects of climate change," he said. "We may not change the whole world at once, but we can protect the place we call home, step by step."**

This year, the Taskforce has recorded several major achievements that align with Zimbabwe's national environmental agenda.

"On 6 November, we partnered with EMA, the Forestry Commission, and Mafakela Primary School for composting training and tree planting," Mnkandla said. "This supports national goals on soil health, food security, and climate mitigation."

The following day, the MHETF joined the National Clean-Up Day, a campaign declared a permanent monthly event in 2022."Taking part shows that communities have a crucial role in turning national policy into practical, local action," he said.

In a city where waste management systems remain strained, the Mafakela Health and Environment Taskforce stands out as a model of how organised residents can strengthen resilience against environmental hazards. What began as a response to loss has transformed into a coordinated effort that improves public health, restores dignity to neighbourhood spaces, and empowers residents especially women with new economic opportunities.

For Mnkandla and the community he represents, the vision remains clear: protecting their future by taking charge of their environment today.

Voices For Water Petitions Govt to Review Water Privatisation Directive

Loraine Phiri

Voices for Water, a social movement advocating for the right to water in Zimbabwe and Southern Africa, has petitioned the Government to reconsider its decision to privatise water services in urban areas, warning that the move could make access to clean water unaffordable for ordinary citizens.

In an interview during the Weekly Pulse, online discussion held on Friday under the theme "Water Privatisation in Zimbabwe: What Is at Stake for Urban Communities?," Voices for Water outlined reasons behind the petition. The discussion coincided with the Africa Week of Action against Water Privatisation, observed across the continent to promote publicly managed water systems.

The Project Coordinator for Voices for Water, Khumbulani Maphosa, said the January 2025 directive by the Ministry of Local Government undermines devolution and could negatively affect low-income residents.

"Zimbabwe is a devolution state, and this ministerial directive is anti-devolution," said Maphosa. "Privatisation increases the bills we pay and removes our voices as citizens in water service delivery."

Under the directive, the Government announced plans to engage private companies both local and international to manage water supply systems in major cities, beginning with Harare, Bulawayo, and Victoria Falls. The Ministry said the decision was made to address inefficiencies by local authorities in billing and water delivery.

However, Maphosa cautioned that experiences from other countries show that water privatisation often fails to deliver the intended improvements.

"In Kenya, they privatised to a company called Vivendi, and it failed to provide the needed infrastructure," he said. "In Guinea, prices of water rose from $0.12 to $0.83 per cubic metre, while in Côte d'Ivoire connectivity declined from 81 percent to 74 percent after six years of privatisation."

He said Zimbabwe itself has seen similar failures in the past, citing Bulawayo's early experience with a private water company.

"Privatisation of water failed here in Bulawayo in the late 1890s with the collapse of the Bulawayo Waterworks Company, which had been formed to manage the city's water supply," he explained. "Even in 1999, the international company BiWater abandoned negotiations on water privatisation in Zimbabwe after concluding it was not economically viable."

Maphosa added that privatisation could cripple communities already struggling with erratic rainfall, prolonged droughts, and climate change, with women, informal traders, and residents of high-density suburbs being the most affected.

Continuation

"Water is a public good and a human right it is an essential resource for our survival and climate resilience," he said. "Studies show that when water is privatised, costs can rise by up to 59 percent. For low-income families, that's unaffordable it's a death sentence. The current free public access to water must be preserved and improved upon."

Instead of privatisation, Maphosa said the country should focus on strengthening public water management systems through structural and financial reforms.

"Zimbabwe's urban water problems stem from four main issues: bulk water shortages, dilapidated infrastructure, poor billing, and non-paying citizens," he said. "To address these challenges, there is a need for genuine devolution of powers to local authorities, capacity building and funding for local governments, and strengthening ZINWA's coordination and regulatory roles."

To support this position, the organisation has launched an online petition calling for the suspension of the privatisation directive.

"We want to see publicly managed water because it is clear we are the birds to be killed by one stone," said Mr Maphosa.

The petition can be accessed at www.change.org/ChallengingZimbabweWaterPrivatizationDirective.

The government has defended the privatisation policy, arguing that private sector participation will improve efficiency in water delivery and ensure sustainability. The Minister of Local Government, Hon Daniel Garwe, in media reports earlier this year, said that many local authorities have failed to provide reliable water services or collect revenue effectively, prompting the need for a new approach.

The Ministry maintains that partnerships with private companies will enable investment in infrastructure and modern water management systems, starting with major urban centres.

NATIONAL CLIMATE EFFORTS & POLICY RESPONSES

Scaling climate action through national strategies and systems

These stories situate local experiences within broader national climate and development efforts

Zimbabwe's 2026 Budget Signals Climate Ambition but Funding Gaps Remain. By Peter Moyo

Zimbabwe Abolishes Solar Equipment Duty in Major Push for Green Energy. By Thembelihle Mhlanga

Youth Voices Call for Inclusion in Zimbabwe's Climate Change Management Bill. By Loraine Phiri

Zimbabwe's 2026 budget signals climate ambition but funding gaps remain

Peter Moyo

Zimbabwe's 2026 National Budget places climate resilience and environmental protection among its stated national priorities, signalling a push toward stronger adaptation systems at a time of intensifying drought risk, degraded ecosystems and persistent climate shocks.

Presenting the budget, Finance Minister Mthuli Ncube announced that the Ministry of Environment, Climate and Wildlife will receive ZiG 510.2 million for climate-change management and environmental programmes.

Treasury frames climate change as a structural economic threat requiring targeted investment, with the 2026 Budget Strategy Paper warning that climate change "presents a significant risk to the country's economic outlook, particularly through its impact on the agriculture sector, which is highly sensitive to weather patterns."

Within the broader economic framework, the Ministry of Lands, Agriculture, Fisheries, Water and Rural Development receives ZiG 26.8 billion, covering irrigation development, dam construction, livestock support and strengthening the Strategic Grain Reserve. Treasury positions these investments as climate-resilience anchors designed to buffer farmers from weather extremes and protect national food supply.

The Strategy Paper outlines government intentions to strengthen climate governance, pointing to the need for a coordinated national response built on evidence-based planning.

Finance Minister Mthuli Ncube

It emphasizes "sustainable adaptation measures, land management, active community participation and targeted policy interventions" as the backbone of Zimbabwe's climate strategy.

Another major commitment is Treasury's pledge to introduce climate-budgeting tools across government to improve transparency and accountability. These tools are expected to enable ministries to identify, cost and prioritise climate-related interventions and to allow "systematic tracking, monitoring and reporting of public expenditure on climate activities." If fully implemented, this could mark a significant shift in how Zimbabwe handles environmental spending..

Despite these ambitions, doubts remain over whether the ZiG 510.2 million allocated to the Environment Ministry is sufficient given the scale of the climate crisis. Historically, large portions of the ministry's budget have gone toward administrative costs, limiting investment in on-the-ground projects such as catchment restoration, reforestation or climate-early warning systems. Analysts often argue that Zimbabwe's adaptation needs — particularly in water, agriculture and community-level resilience — require far larger, ring-fenced budgets.

The 2026 budget marks an important step in aligning public spending with climate risk. The direction is clear and the commitments are more deliberate than in recent years. What remains uncertain is whether the allocations will translate into real, measurable improvements for farmers, rural communities and ecosystems already under severe climate pressure. Implementation capacity, political will and rigorous accountability will determine whether the promises made on paper evolve into resilience on the ground

Zimbabwe abolishes solar equipment duty in major push for green energy

Thembelihle Mhlanga

Zimbabwe has abolished import duty on all solar equipment in a decisive move aimed at accelerating the country's transition to renewable energy, cutting emissions, and attracting large-scale investment into the green economy.

The announcement was delivered on Tuesday at the Zim-Zam Energy Projects Summit by Deputy Minister of Higher and Tertiary Education, Innovation, Science and Technology Development, Hon. Yeukai Simbanegavi, who said the policy shift forms part of a broader national strategy to build a resilient, low-carbon energy future.

Addressing delegates drawn from government, business, development partners, and regional energy bodies, Simbanegavi said removing import duty would immediately lower the cost of solar equipment for households, companies, and independent power producers.

"This initiative will ease the burden of energy poverty and environmental degradation while positioning Zimbabwe as a regional leader in green transition," she said, prompting strong applause from delegates.
Beyond scrapping import duty, the Deputy Minister revealed that additionalinvestment incentives are being finalised for companies establishing solar plants across Zimbabwe. These include eased licensing procedures, possible tax breaks, and support mechanisms aimed at reducing upfront capital costs, widely considered the biggest barrier to entry for renewable energy projects.

"By reducing financial hurdles, we want to unlock private investment and accelerate solar plant construction nationwide," she added. The measures come at a time when Zimbabwe is battling recurrent power shortages, ageing thermal plants, and rising energy demand

Officials say expanding solar capacity is now a national priority to stabilise supply and meet climate-change commitments.

Energy experts at the summit noted that Zimbabwe has one of the highest solar irradiance levels in Southern Africa, averaging more than 2,500 hours of sunshine annually. With strategic investment, the country could not only power domestic industries and households but eventually export surplus clean energy to the region.

Simbanegavi stressed that the transition to clean energy must centre communities. Government plans to roll out public education programmes on the benefits of solar power, especially for rural and peri-urban households still reliant on firewood and kerosene.

"A greener economy requires a knowledgeable citizenry. We want communities to understand that renewable energy is not just an alternative — it is a pathway to better health, prosperity, and sustainable development," she said.

The Zim-Zam Energy Projects Summit attended by policymakers, regional blocs, financiers, and private-sector leaders underscored a growing consensus that the window for energy transformation is now. Delegates described the government's new measures as a "watershed moment" for unlocking green investment and strengthening climate resilience.

While experts caution that challenges remain — including grid modernisation, storage technologies, and financing — Zimbabwe's latest reforms offer a strong foundation for long-term clean-energy growth.

As Simbanegavi concluded: **"This is not just an energy decision. It is a commitment to sustainability, responsible development, and the legacy we leave for future generations."**

Youth Voices Call for Inclusion in Zimbabwe's Climate Change Management Bill

Loraine Phiri

In the latest edition of the Weekly Pulse WhatsApp discussion, young climate advocates examined the Climate Change Management Bill, 2025, highlighting its potential to strengthen Zimbabwe's climate governance and calling for greater youth inclusion and awareness.

The discussion, moderated by Providence Moyo, featured Praise Mlambo, a youth climate advocate and legal practitioner, and Praise Govere, Research and Projects Development Manager at Climate Control.

Understanding Zimbabwe's Climate Challenges

Opening the discussion, Praise Mlambo outlined some of the country's pressing environmental issues. "Zimbabwe is facing numerous climate issues — droughts, heatwaves, flooding, and human health impacts."

She said these impacts underline the need for a strong legal foundation for climate action, which the Bill seeks to provide through a coordinated national framework.

Why the Bill Matters

Praise Govere observed that existing climate regulations have faced challenges of weak coordination and limited funding.

"Issues in Zimbabwe's climate change regulations include fragmented institutional responsibilities, gaps in greenhouse gas emissions management, and funding constraints for climate initiatives. That's why we now see the Climate Change Management Bill being pushed to become an Act."

He added that the Bill "aims to address these by consolidating climate governance, regulating emissions, establishing a carbon trading framework via the Zimbabwe Carbon Registry, and mobilizing resources through the National Climate Fund, aligning with constitutional environmental rights and global climate commitments."

According to Clause 3 of the Bill, its objectives include establishing an institutional framework for managing climate change, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, promoting adaptation and mitigation, and mobilizing finance through mechanisms such as the National Climate Fund and a carbon trading system.

Main Pillars of the Framework

Mlambo summarized the Bill's four key pillars:"The Bill seeks to make provision for institutional frameworks that supervise all activities related to climate change; mitigation and adaptation; to make provisions for low GHG emissions; and compliance."

Govere added that it "will strengthen Zimbabwe's approach to climate change through adaptation, mitigation, and resource mobilization balancing environmental protection with national development needs."

Continuation

Carbon Credit Registry and Transparency

A major feature of the Bill is the establishment of the Zimbabwe Carbon Credit Registry, under Clause 12, which will register and verify all carbon trading projects to ensure environmental integrity and transparency.

Explaining its role, Govere said:"The registry tracks and verifies carbon credits to ensure transparency. Every carbon project must be registered, then checks will be done to ensure credits are genuine. There will be regular updates on projects, and a committee will manage and monitor the process."

Mlambo welcomed the move but highlighted the need for greater accessibility for young people. "Setting up a carbon structure is a step in the right direction. However, I am not entirely convinced that it will automatically give access to climate finance. There's still a lot to be desired in terms of awareness and capacity building for young people to fully participate in this market."

She emphasized the importance of training programs and youth-focused financing mechanisms to ensure meaningful participation in the carbon market.

Governance and Inclusion

On the composition of the Registry's board, Govere said that "governing aspects of carbon trading and the Zimcarbon registry will be appointed by the Minister responsible for Climate Change Management," and will include "government officials in the Ministry, private sector and climate experts."

The Bill guarantees, under Clause 5, every citizen's right to access climate information and participate in decision-making, while also promoting transparency, accountability, and the inclusion of vulnerable groups. Govere commended these provisions but said more could be done for youth inclusion.

"It is commendable that there is inclusion of vulnerable people in the Bill. As a young person, I would like to see provisions that prioritize youth inclusion, capacity building, and benefit sharing in the carbon credit framework."

He proposed that a fixed share of carbon credit proceeds be set aside as youth climate finance to support innovation, education, and community-based projects.

Implementation, Compliance, and Incentives

On enforcement, Mlambo explained: "One of the objectives of the Bill is compliance. You will note that in the second schedule there are penalties for liability. Once the Bill is enacted and becomes law, its enforcement will automatically be possible."

She also referred to Clause 38, which empowers the Minister to offer incentives for entities that reduce emissions or adopt renewable energy technologies. "By doing so, Zimbabwe will be reducing its greenhouse gas emissions, protecting its natural resources, and creating new economic opportunities," she said.

Continuation

Balancing Growth and Sustainability

Asked about the Bill's implications for a developing economy, Mlambo noted:
"While it may attract foreign investment and generate revenue, the informal sector's ability to comply with regulations could be a challenge. The Bill promotes sustainable development and environmental protection, but its success depends on building local capacity and ensuring fair benefit sharing."

Youth at the Centre of Climate Action

As Zimbabwe continues nationwide public hearings on the Climate Change Management Bill, 2025, participants agreed that young people have a vital role to play in shaping the country's climate policy.

Summarizing this view, Govere said:

"As a young person, I would like the Bill to include specific provisions that promote youth participation in decision-making, capacity building in climate resilience, and active involvement in carbon markets, including fair benefit sharing from carbon credits. It should also integrate climate education, foster green job creation, and support youth-led climate innovation and community projects. This would mean setting aside a defined percentage of proceeds from carbon credits as dedicated youth climate finance."

Both speakers agreed that empowering young people will be central to ensuring that the Bill translates from legislation into tangible action that protects the environment and supports sustainable livelihoods.

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