

Cash aid rewards poverty: Villagers

The Herald - Sifelani Tsiko in Matobo

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Some of the Thuthukani Garden club members in Matobo District

Bekezela Sibanda, a mother of six from the Phumuzamaphiko area of Matobo District in southern Zimbabwe, is not convinced that giving people a small and steady stream of cash with no strings attached may be the smartest way to address poverty.

She argues strongly that cash aid implicitly rewards poverty and encourages families to remain poor.

“Cash aid is killing our people here in Matobo,” said Sibanda.

“Some people when they receive the US\$50 from an NGO giving us cash as food aid, they spend it on beer.

“Yes, we need food aid, but it must be spent wisely on food. The most important kind of aid is the one that empowers us to grow our own food and earn some income on our own.”

Fidelia Moyo, a mother of six from Mazhayimbe Village, has similar notions buried so deep within the souls of hard working people in Matobo District.

“We need better aid such as solar-powered boreholes and sand abstraction systems such as the ones we got from Fambidzanayi Permaculture Centre and Practical Action which empower us to grow our own food crops and make money,” she said.

“We now have access to water and with the training we got, we can now till our gardens and grow onions, tomatoes, cabbages, butter nuts, beans and other crops to feed our families and sell the surplus.”

People in the drought prone Matobo District are receiving US\$50 cash assistance for food aid till April 2020.

Moyo and Sibanda said wisely-designed anti-poverty programmes that improve access to solar-powered water and irrigation equipment can greatly increase productivity among smallholder farmers in the area.

“Water is critical here and it’s the major element that can empower us to feed ourselves in our area,” said Moyo.

“Growing what you eat and having the means to do so is important. Food aid is temporary and we cannot go far. Very soon in April, it will end and how do we survive from there.”

Fambidzanayi Permaculture Centre and Practical Action are implementing the Renewable Energy Empowering Women Farmers (REEWF) project that has helped in the establishment of 18 solar systems to power irrigation in Gwanda and Matobo districts.

The US\$1,3 million project is funded by the Isle of Man Government and has benefited many households in the two districts.

Fambidzanayi Permaculture Centre field officer Cris Dungeni said solar-powered irrigation systems were critical in improving food security in the district.

“We are quite confident that access to solar-powered water and irrigation equipment will enhance food security among households here in Matobo district,” he said.

“For people to cross from poverty to a better life, they need water first and secondly they need irrigation equipment. Other things such as inputs and training may then be needed to empower them to feed themselves.

“Cash aid will not take people far. It has a catch and it makes people not keen to grow their own food.”

A fleet of studies by development experts have argued that food aid cripples or makes people less productive.

They say it discourages them from working and makes them heavily dependent on aid.

Others feel it is still necessary and it should be reserved for people who really can't work — the elderly, the sick, the disabled, single mothers with lots of children and for children in schools in areas which are drought stricken.

Food aid is merry-go round.

Even if people use the money for legitimate needs like food, they will be right back where they started, after spending it.

They will need more help, making cash aid an unsustainable approach despite all the criticism that goes with it.

"We all love cash aid, but it doesn't take us anywhere," said Thandekile Ncube of Mabandazulu Village, where she and other women now run the Mwewe Garden with solar-powered sand abstraction system.

"I see myself in Canaan, I feel empowered by this project. I can smell great success and I know that we will soon grow our own crops and earn a living.

"Growing your own food is better than food relief. Food relief kills us, it makes us very lazy."

And, in the end, striking the right balance between providing genuine food aid to deserving recipients and empowering the people with tools to grow their own food is the way to lift people out of the cycle of poverty.

<https://www.herald.co.zw/cash-aid-rewards-poverty-villagers/>