



Bethany Project Newsletter

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BETHANY PROJECT MISSION

To mobilize communities to participate in identifying and promoting the well-being of female and male children and youths living with HIV, orphaned, with disabilities and vulnerable through resource mobilization, training, networking, advocacy and effective monitoring as well as raising awareness on HIV and AIDS prevention to all young people and the management of chronic diseases in the Southern Semi-Arid Region of Zimbabwe

PURPOSE

Until every child and youth has equal access to resources

DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

As we step into the second quarter of 2025, I am pleased to share this edition of the Bethany Project newsletter, reflecting on the continued progress we are making in our mission to foster safer, healthier, and more empowered children and youths in the Zvishavane and Mberengwa districts. Our work remains firmly grounded in our core strategic pillars—Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), prevention of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV), Community Capacity Building, Institutional Strengthening, Food Security, and Social and Economic Empowerment. Each of these pillars continues to drive meaningful and lasting change within the communities we serve. Notably, our Food Security initiatives have empowered families to achieve greater food sovereignty and improved nutrition, even in the face of persistent socioeconomic and environmental challenges. Unparalleled, our Social and Economic Empowerment efforts have helped break the cycle of poverty by equipping individuals with essential skills and entrepreneurial support, enabling them to build sustainable and dignified livelihoods. These ongoing efforts underscore our commitment to creating environments where every child and youth has the opportunity to thrive. As we look ahead to the rest of the year, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to all our supporters, partners, and stakeholders—your steadfast support and shared commitment are the foundation of our success. Thank you for continuing to walk this journey with us. We look forward to bringing you more stories of transformation and hope in the coming months.



Mejry Makumbe's Journey from Aspiring Farmer to District Champion

In 2024, Mejry Makume, a young and determined woman from Mapirimira Ward, was selected as a model farmer under the BRIC ZIM Project, an initiative aimed at enhancing agricultural productivity through training and resource support. With guidance from Agritex officers, Mejry learned advanced farming techniques, including soil health management and crop diversification. The Bethany Project further empowered her by providing gypsum fertilizer, high-yield groundnut seeds, and orange fruit tree seedling, which became the foundation of her success. She meticulously applied her training, optimizing soil fertility and nurturing her crops, particularly the groundnuts, which thrived under her care. Her dedication bore fruit in 2025 when she won the prestigious Agronomy Field Day in her ward surpassing even the most experienced farmers in the district. The superior quality of her groundnuts, a direct result of the Bethany Project's support, played a pivotal role in her victory, earning her recognition as a rising star in agriculture.

Emboldened by her achievement, Mejry pledged to expand and diversify her farming enterprise to promote food security and nutrition in her community. She recognized the importance of a balanced diet and planned to integrate more nutrient-rich crops, such as beans, sweet potatoes, and leafy greens, alongside her thriving groundnuts and citrus trees. Her success story became an inspiration, especially to young women in agriculture, proving that with knowledge, resources, and perseverance, even smallholder farmers can achieve remarkable results. As a role model under the BRIC ZIM Project, Mejry continues to advocate for sustainable farming practices, aiming to mentor others while scaling her own farm into a diverse, productive, and resilient agribusiness. Her journey underscores the transformative power of targeted agricultural support and the untapped potential of youth and women in driving rural development.



Agronomy field day in Mapirimira ward at one of our model farmers' place. photo credit: Bethany Project, T Ruvengo 03/04/2025

The Launch of the Care to Share Project in Zvishavane – A New Dawn for Youth Empowerment

The launch of the Care to Share Project marked a transformative step in youth empowerment, uniting government agencies, local authorities, and community organizations in a shared mission to tackle youth unemployment. This collaborative initiative aims to equip 120 disadvantaged young people with vocational training, entrepreneurship skills, and psychosocial support over a two-year period. During the planning meeting, officials highlighted how the program aligns with national development goals, citing previous successful vocational programs that achieved high completion rates. The project's comprehensive approach includes hands-on training through industry partnerships, startup kits for graduates, and mobile health services to support trainees' wellbeing. With substantial funding secured, the program is positioned to make a lasting impact by creating pathways to employment and self-sufficiency.

Key discussions at the meeting focused on ensuring the initiative's long-term sustainability through dedicated youth workspaces and ongoing support systems. Local government representatives committed to facilitating appropriate training and business locations, while technical experts emphasized the importance of proper certification and safeguarding measures. Bethany Project outlined robust protection policies to ensure a safe learning environment, including specialized oversight personnel. Participants unanimously recognized the project's potential to not only transform individual lives but also strengthen the local economy by developing a skilled workforce. As the meeting concluded, there was strong consensus about the need for continued cooperation among all partners to maximize the program's benefits for youth and communities alike. This initiative represents a significant investment in human capital development and a model for effective public-private partnership in addressing youth empowerment challenges.



Inception meeting with the Mberengwa stakeholders for the Care to Share program. photo credit: Bethany Project, T Ruvengo 28/03/2025

Jacqueline's Journey: From Despair to Triumph

Jacqueline Ncube, a young woman from Ture Ward under Chief Wedza in Zvishavane District, endured a childhood filled with pain and hardship. Growing up in a home plagued by domestic violence, she witnessed her mother suffer brutal abuse at the hands of her father. The constant fear and instability forced her to drop out of school at just 16 years old. When her mother passed away in 2020, Jacqueline and her younger brother were left vulnerable. Their father remarried, but instead of finding care, Jacqueline faced even greater cruelty from her stepmother—physical beatings, forced labour, and being denied food as punishment. While other children of her age attended school, she was made to sell tomatoes, deepening her sense of isolation and despair.

With no support system, Jacqueline saw marriage as her only escape. At 16, she eloped with a boyfriend, pretending to be pregnant in hopes of finding safety. However, her new life quickly turned into another nightmare. When her pregnancy timeline was questioned, her husband turned abusive, eventually abandoning her and fleeing the country. Pregnant and with nowhere to go, Jacqueline was forced to return to her stepmother's home, where the abuse continued. She gave birth at home without medical care, and when her baby struggled due to malnutrition, she felt utterly hopeless.

A turning point came when Jacqueline was admitted to Zvishavane District Hospital, where she encountered the Bethany Project, this intervention changed her life. She received vital nutritional support (lactogen and peanut butter) for her baby, along with counselling and encouragement to return to school. Inspired by this lifeline, Jacqueline made the courageous decision to re-enrol in education in 2023, despite the stigma and mockery she faced as an older student.

Determined to build a better future, Jacqueline also participated in Bethany Project and Oxfam's entrepreneurship training for teen mothers. With start-up capital, she launched a broiler chicken business, which quickly became a success. The income allowed her to pay her school fees and examination costs, and in 2024, she sat for her O-Level exams. Against all odds, she emerged as Ture Secondary School's top student, achieving an impressive 6 B's and 2 C's.

Today, Jacqueline is a symbol of resilience and hope. Her thriving broiler business not only sustains her and her child but also fuels her dreams of further education or nursing training. Reflecting on her journey, she says, "Without Bethany Project and Oxfam, I wouldn't have survived. They turned my pain into purpose."

Her story is a powerful testament to the impact of targeted support, education, and economic empowerment. Once trapped in a cycle of abuse and poverty, Jacqueline has broken free, proving that even the darkest past can lead to a brighter future. Through her strength and the help of compassionate organizations, she has transformed her life and now serves as an inspiration to others in her community

The Funeral That Gave Birth to Hope: Tsitsidashe's Journey

Tsitsidashe's life had been shaped by silence—first as a child bride, then as a seventh wife in a polygamous Apostolic household. By 18, she had three children and no voice. The world had taught her that her body was not her own, that clinics were sinful, and that education was beyond her reach. But in 2024, at a funeral that felt like any other, everything changed.

A Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights Champion named Linear Takawira stood before the gathering and spoke words Tsitsidashe had never heard: "You have rights. Your body belongs to you." Ten minutes. That was all it took. Trembling, Tsitsidashe approached Linear afterward and whispered her truth. That conversation led her to the Pamumvuri Forum, a sanctuary where girls like her learned the unthinkable—that they could choose.

At first, she listened in quiet disbelief. Then, piece by piece, she reclaimed her life. She secretly began contraception. She took her children to the clinic, defying years of doctrine, and watched as her youngest received lifesaving vaccines. But the most dangerous rebellion came in December 2025, when she uttered a forbidden dream: "I want to go back to school."

To her shock, her relatives agreed. Her brothers helped her re-enroll; her Pamumvuri sisters scraped together \$18 for fees. Today, she walks the halls of Mabasa Secondary School, a Form 3 student clutching her books like weapons. The girl who once bowed her head now lifts her chin and speaks of becoming an SRHR advocate, of returning to her sect to shatter the chains that still bind others.

Her journey has already sent ripples through her community. Other girls whisper questions. Mothers eye the clinic doors with new curiosity. And Tsitsidashe, once invisible, now stands as proof—that a single spark of knowledge can ignite a revolution.

"An informed girl is a protected girl," she says. And she will not be the last.



"To promote comprehensive and sustainable community based care and support for male and female children and youths affected by HIV and AIDS, living with disabilities and vulnerable"

Scaling up menstrual health management systems in our schools and communities

Menstrual hygiene management involves access to necessary supplies, maintaining cleanliness and practicing responsible disposal of used products. Proper management of menstrual hygiene helps prevent infections and promotes overall well-being and self-confidence, particularly in school settings where girls may face challenges related to privacy and access to facilities. Girls may avoid attending school during menstrual periods due to fear of stigmatization, bullying and inadequate girl friendly facilities. Talking openly about menstruation and puberty and educating both boys and girls is an essential move towards reducing feelings of shame and discomfort around this topic. Bethany Project in partnership with Oxfam through the Judith Nelson Foundation support have taken a bold stance in the construction of girl friendly latrine in six secondary and four primary schools. Seven girl friendly latrines have so far been completed and three more are still under construction. The targeted secondary schools are Ngomeyebani, Mpumelelo, Utongani, Ture, Govarizadze and Shonhai, whereas primary schools are Ingome, Rusvinge, Sibozza and Sivanga. One village head in Mapiromira ward had this to say: Gone are the days when traditional and cultural social norms define menstruation as sacred.

Bethany Project and Oxfam have taught us that menstruation and menstrual hygiene is a true reflection of women anatomy. It is natural and health and good for the family and the society at large. As village heads, we should stand firm and encourage all households to budget for sanitary wear, building women/girl friendly facilities and share the correct knowledge about the importance of menstrual hygiene management systems and ultimately championing the well-being of our communities through a critical and safeguarding eye on our girl children:



typical girl friendly toilet in one of the model schools for menstrual health management

My name is Tinashe Moyo (pseudonym), a resident of Cago Village in Ward 15. Today, I attended a food aid verification process, expecting only to check if my name was on the beneficiary list. But what I didn't anticipate was the life-changing lesson on gender-based violence (GBV) that came with it. Little did I know, this information would open my eyes to a painful situation in my own family—one I had failed to recognize as abuse. Last December (2024), my 15-year-old stepdaughter, a Form 2 student, came home late at night. When we tried to discipline her, she ran away with her so-called boyfriend. Later, we learned that a boy had escorted her home that evening. The next morning, she returned, and as a family, we sat down to resolve the issue. At the time, there was no indication that anything beyond disobedience had occurred—certainly no mention of sexual abuse. We accepted her back, only to discover last month that she is now pregnant—and she confirmed the father is the same boy.

Since then, we've tried engaging the boy's family, but our efforts have been futile. We didn't know what steps to take or whether this even counted as a case worth reporting. That's why today's GBV session was so critical for me. For the first time, I understood that what happened to my stepdaughter was a crime—one that should have been reported to the police immediately. If we had known this last December, we might have prevented this pregnancy and sought justice for her.

Now, I feel empowered. I know what to do next, and I plan to report this case to the authorities. I will also go home and educate my family about GBV, so they too can recognize and act against such injustices. This session was more than just about food distribution—it was about protection, awareness, and making a real difference in people's lives. Thank you for this vital knowledge.

“To promote comprehensive and sustainable community based care and support for male and female children and youths affected by HIV and AIDS, living with disabilities and vulnerable”

Gallery



Graduation of Village Health Workers for community health clubs methodology in WASH. photo credit: Bethany Project, T Ruvengo 31/01/2025



Market and Needs Assessments for the Care to Share Program. photo credit: Bethany Project, T Ruvengo 03/04/2025



Proceedings during the training of influencing committees on gender responsive budgeting



Strengthening of referral pathway systems - Capacity building of G & C teachers, school health masters, SDC chairpersons and their respective secretaries