

Building Asset Stock for Resilience in Vulnerable Communities in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

Developing countries are adversely affected by natural shocks such as droughts, floods and storms, which have profound effects on the rural population. The Zimbabwe Resilience Building Fund (ZRBF) was convened in response to serious economic, environmental and social shocks and stresses that affect rural communities in Zimbabwe. However, few studies are available on disaster situations that measure how farmer response to shocks and how the availability of capital assets contribute to resilience building, which is the focus of this chapter. Natural disasters, exogenous shocks to income and consumption disrupt poorly equipped low-income households. Although the fundamental role that assets can play in poverty reduction and development is generally recognised in the literature, understanding the role of assets in supporting smallholder vulnerable communities and households to build their resilience to shocks remains implicit. The following were the objectives of the research study: to ascertain types of shocks faced by households; to determine the types of interventions in the project areas; to examine how smallholder vulnerable communities in Zimbabwe plan for and respond to external shocks; and to establish the factors affecting household resilience. Panel survey data collected in three rounds from 2019 to 2021 in 18 districts of Zimbabwe during the ZRBF programme implementation by the seven consortia was used for the study. To assess the relationship between resilience capacity and underlying socio-economic and demographic predictors, we were guided by the resilience framework applying random effects panel probit model. The resilience framework was used to assess the complex relationships between resilience, household assets, demographic characteristics and behavioural response to shocks by farmers. The results showed that socio-economic dynamics such as age, household size, income diversity and access to services and information are critical. Again, assets and how households respond to shocks are an essential part of the response to hazards. When considered by round, social capital indices experienced substantial gains for the three years. Property titling and security of tenure, mainly ownership of homes, were shown to increase the likelihood of willingness to invest in longer-term adaptive mechanisms. Access to financial services and household savings, whether in the form of livestock or cash, should be promoted as a coping mechanism in anticipation and response to shocks.