

From Small Savings to Big Impact: How Tashinga's Women Turned Grain into Opportunity

📍 Dande Valley, Ward 3 — Mount Darwin, Zimbabwe



No smallholder should suffer the indignity of poverty



In the heart of Mount Darwin's dry Dande Valley, where formal markets are thin and drought is a constant threat, 11 women from Tashinga village gathered under a tree with one big idea: what if their tiny savings could do more than buy groceries? What if they could transform the way farmers harvest and market grain?

Fast-forward two years, and that idea has become a thriving agroecological business that has served 52 farmers, processed over 80 tonnes of sorghum, and sparked a quiet revolution in how rural Zimbabweans access technology and markets.

"We used to wait days for someone to bring a thresher from 20km away," says group chairperson Tezima Kazembe. "Now we have our own—and we're saving the harvest, saving time, and making money."

The journey began in 2022 with an Internal Savings and Lending (ISAL) group. Each member contributed just USD 4 a month, later rising to USD 10. Loans were issued at 20% monthly interest and repaid faithfully. In 2023, the group applied for a community matching grant supported by the Agricultural Partnerships for Transformation (APT). Their vision was to acquire

a mechanised sorghum threshing machine—something the community desperately needed.

The machine cost USD 3,236, of which the group contributed USD 568 from their savings. In their first full season of operation, they served 52 farmers and earned 8 tonnes of grain through an in-kind payment model. This grain was later sold, generating enough income for the group to purchase a second engine, ensuring operational continuity. The grain was sold for approximately USD 2,042, enough to fund a second engine without further external support.

APT facilitated a unique contract farming model involving 20 local sorghum farmers. But unlike conventional models, these farmers were not required to sell their harvest to the group. Instead, they were obliged to repay the cost of seed with a bucket of sorghum (per farmer), and to use the group's threshing service, paying a grain-based fee. This approach ensured strong uptake, high machine utilisation, and local trust—without enforcing restrictive buyer contracts.

By receiving payment in kind, the group began to aggregate significant volumes of clean sorghum—over 8 tonnes in just one season. In rural areas, where individual farmers rarely produce at scale, this aggregation was key.

APT coordinated access to the Zimbabwe Mercantile Exchange (ZMX), making the group's grain visible to bulk buyers for the first time. Buyers were especially drawn by the single point of collection—a rare advantage in remote zones.



"Aggregation is always the missing link," explains an APT field officer. "But when a group collects 8 tonnes of clean sorghum, buyers start to take notice."

Although the group may not use the word, their work embodies key agroecological principles: recycling (sorghum chaff is reused as livestock feed and fertiliser), economic diversification (the group operates across savings, lending, threshing, and aggregation), fairness (a women-led business serving both male and female farmers), and co-creation of knowledge (the business plan and flexible contract model was shaped through local input).

APT's role is not to run the business—but to facilitate, connect, and build capacity. It supported the group with seed capital via matching grants, training and mentoring, and market linkage to ZMX and input suppliers.

"With APT's facilitation and seed capital, the women of Tashinga built a thriving business—designed, owned, and led by them. Today, they are aggregators, market actors, and agents of change."

"As one member puts it: 'We started with savings—now we have a business, a market, and a future.'"

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