

Return to our roots

The SEED Project's strategy, 2019-2023

After 12 years of working with communities in Zimbabwe to support their development, The SEED Project (SEED) is now looking forward to the next 5 years with excitement and commitment. We want to build on what we have done to date; strengthening and expanding our work with the people of Zimbabwe, as well as reorienting our work towards the long-term sustainable development – or ‘resilience’ – of communities.

This strategy has been developed to guide our staff, trustees, volunteers, supporters, partners and the communities we work with. It serves to explain how The SEED Project works and why, and what we are hoping to achieve over the next 5 years.

Executive summary

Within its **mission** of holistic sustainable community development in Southern Africa, The SEED Project will continue to focus work solely in the area surrounding Harare, **Zimbabwe**. The **values** of community leadership and feedback; holistic development and sustainability; equity and inclusion; effectiveness and efficiency will govern our work in Zimbabwe. In order to return to the organisation’s roots of a **vision** for the resilience of whole communities (not just one group) across all interconnected aspects of life (e.g. water, health, education), we will pursue four **strategic priorities**:

1. Pilot SEED’s community resilience model
2. Develop operational tools
3. Develop human resources
4. Develop financial resources

We will achieve each of these strategic priorities by first developing an operational plan, to include measures of success against which progress can be monitored.

Mission

The SEED Project helps communities work themselves out of poverty in a sustainable way, with the effect that we work ourselves out of a job. **Success is a community that doesn't need us any more.**



The mission of SEED is:

To facilitate holistic community development in the socially and economically disadvantaged communities of Southern Africa, empowering them to be better able to reach their full potential, to identify and help meet their needs, and to participate more fully in society. To enable churches and other community groups to do the same, thus ensuring that the work is sustainable.

SEED began in Zimbabwe in 2006, and since then has worked with communities where unemployment, ill health and hunger are high, and opportunities, hope and education are low. The focus of SEED has always been on empowerment and the long-term sustainability of communities. SEED aims to partner with local communities, churches, schools and other groups to identify needs and dreams within communities and then to facilitate the meeting of those needs and the realisation of those dreams.

The SEED Project aims to be true to each local context, and work with existing people, skills and resources in order to increase ownership of results and sustainability of future work. The SEED Project partners with, and exchanges ideas with, other local, national and international organisations as they work towards the realisation of common goals.

Over the past 12 years, SEED's projects in Harare and surrounding rural areas have covered the following themes:

- **Health:** e.g. cholera health education; drug abuse and HIV awareness
- **Education, life skills and employment:** e.g. establishing pre-schools; developing practical and business skills for improved livelihoods; micro-lending schemes
- **Environment:** e.g. tree planting; clean up campaigns
- **Agriculture:** e.g. improving vegetable productivity; linking producers with markets
- **Community development:** we helped a rural community with 300 orphans set up their own pre-school, route electricity to their village, and obtain major health benefits by establishing a reliable water supply and improving crop variety and yield.

Zimbabwe

SEED's mission statement covers Southern Africa. We started in Zimbabwe due to the founders' personal connections, and due to the significant need in the country, particularly when other agencies were pulling out.

Over the past decade, Zimbabwe has faced a series of political and economic crises that have led to the general decline in the standard of living and breakdown of public health, education



and infrastructure. There has been a collapse of the commercial agricultural sector, exceptionally high rates of unemployment across the population and an increased reliance on small scale rain-fed agriculture to survive. Zimbabwe is also facing the worsening impact of climate change, with increasingly erratic weather contributing significantly to the country's recurrent food insecurity. Life is becoming more and more difficult for the majority of the population.

Despite these seemingly incessant challenges, Zimbabweans have remarkable resilience, relatively high levels of education (regional comparison), a tradition of looking after one another in community and access to significant natural and human resources. There is great opportunity for communities to work together to secure their own sustainable development, with guidance and support.

Therefore, SEED is more relevant than ever in **supporting communities not only to survive but to thrive, and to have strong skills and resources for their sustained development. SEED can stand with Zimbabwean communities against a dependence on aid and help them to plan for the future.**

There is a lot of work still to be done in Zimbabwe, so SEED plans to continue focusing its efforts within the country over the next 5 years. This means that, whilst expansion to other countries in Southern Africa is still a long-term aim, there are no current plans for it. More specifically, we will focus our efforts on 'forgotten' urban communities (e.g. low-income districts, and domestic workers within high-income suburbs) as well as rural communities that can be reached from Harare without the need for an overnight stay. The reason for this is that there is no shortage of unmet need in these areas and, as a very small charity, SEED can make the most efficient and effective use of its limited resources if it remains based in Harare and minimises travel time and cost.

Values

In all SEED's work in Zimbabwe, the following values will be put into practice.

Community leadership and feedback

Community leadership is central to SEED's approach in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of projects. This should also include mechanisms for communities and local partners to give us feedback about how the work is going or could be improved as the project goes along, and in the final evaluation.

SEED acts as a **community consultant** to support and guide these processes and supports initiatives that are highlighted as important to communities' future development. As with other consultants, SEED only advises and assists; the client (the community) sets the brief and implements the advice.



Using an ‘asset building approach’ (where ‘assets’ include physical, social and human capital) we will focus on:

- community assets and strengths rather than problems and needs
- identifying and mobilising individual and community assets, skills and passions
- using a community- and relationship- driven approach – ‘building communities from the inside out’

Holistic development and sustainability

SEED takes a holistic approach to development by recognising that many household and community issues are interlinked and are not easily ‘boxed’ into single categories. We help communities to consider their wide ranging needs and how to collectively address them. SEED aims to ensure that our support to communities empowers them to consider and balance competing needs for development: their society, their economic needs and the environment.

‘Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own need’¹

Equity and inclusion

SEED aims to empower the **whole** community towards development. There is a realisation that existing power structures in communities can lead to certain groups (e.g. young people, people with disabilities, the poorest or women and girls) being excluded, either physically, socially, or economically. Without careful consideration, SEED-supported projects could inadvertently reinforce those exclusions, limiting the benefits available to those who need them most, and causing communities to miss out on the essential positive contributions that excluded groups can bring to the whole community’s development.

It is important that SEED works with communities to consider inequalities in the early community analysis stage, and then factors that into the design and implementation of all community projects, especially regarding who participates, who leads and who needs extra support to ensure that their rights are realised and needs are met.

Effectiveness and efficiency

SEED aims to ensure efficient and effective support to communities, making the most of human and financial resources. SEED will prioritise achieving quality long-term sustainable outcomes that leave no-one behind, and respect people, culture and environment. This may cost more than achieving short-term, one-size-fits-all, quick-wins but is so much more valuable. Working within these principles, SEED will support communities to find the most cost-effective practical approach to achieving their goals. One way of achieving this will be by working in partnership with local organisations, government agencies, groups and individuals,

¹ Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: *Our Common Future*, Brundtland (1987)

making the most of local knowledge and existing specialist expertise. Another will be by encouraging each community we work with to support others, using what they have learned with SEED.

Vision: return to our roots

Teach a man to fish

We've all heard the traditional proverb;

*"Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day;
teach a man to fish and he will eat for a lifetime."*

A
B

In fact, SEED has often quoted it in support of our approach. However, the proverb is not actually true. In reality,

Teach a man to fish, and he will eat until circumstances change, e.g. the fish stocks become depleted, or his nets are stolen or damaged, or he gets sick...

B

The fact is that teaching an individual a single skill is just not enough to achieve a sustainable improvement in quality of life. The impact will last longer than humanitarian aid ('Give a man a fish,') but an environmental, economic or other shock or change of circumstances, could undo some or all the benefits gained.

So, we can look at the next level of – more sustainable - development:

Teach a community to fish sustainably* and most of its members will eat for a long time, until there is a dramatic shock (e.g. poisoned water from industry upstream, or rivers dry up unseasonably, or prohibitively priced fishing permits are introduced, or a disease epidemic affects most of the community).

C

*including understanding their ecosystem and how to make / repair the necessary equipment

As you will see, the additional elements of the intervention enable the community to ride the storms that were so disastrous in example B, i.e. understanding the balance of the ecosystem enables fish stocks to be carefully managed, the ability to maintain necessary equipment enables nets to be replaced when they are stolen or repaired when they are damaged, and training the whole community rather than one individual ensures that they can provide for each other when they are sick. However, there are still limitations:

- ‘most of its members’ will eat – without any particular focus on inclusion, it is possible that certain groups would be left out, e.g. people with disabilities, orphans, widows
- The community are unable to overcome a dramatic shock that challenges the viability of their whole lifestyle

In order to overcome these barriers, the community needs to be resilient; it needs to be able to adapt to changing circumstances and to ensure that each member gives according to their ability and receives according to their need.

*Teach a community to **work together** to meet all its members' needs, to **solve problems**, and to **adapt, understanding the connections** between each other and their environment, **passing on knowledge and skills** to their neighbours and children, and they will **thrive for generations, resilient to life's challenges**.*

D

In summary:

- Aid:** Give a man a fish
- Development:** Teach a man to fish
- Sustainable development:** Teach a community to fish sustainably
- Holistic sustainable development and resilience:** Teach a community to work together, solve problems, adapt, understand connections and pass on knowledge and skills

Aiming higher

The SEED Project has always aspired to the highest level of development [D], but has yet to achieve it. To date, most of our work has been at levels B and C, with an occasional venture into level D. SEED has learned to achieve and measure outcomes in projects that address one or two specific needs (e.g. income & health) with and for selected members of a community (e.g. farmers, market traders). Now we will aim for, and measure, more holistic outcomes – those which address a range of interconnected needs, and benefit the whole community.

The intention is to re-orientate SEED’s approach so that it is consistently focused on level D. A large part of achieving this will be to measure success in terms of the **resilience of whole communities**. SEED will create or adopt a system for measuring communities’ progress towards level D, measuring SEED’s impact in terms of the progress communities make towards level D. There might be elements of self- peer- and external-assessment, certificates and an annual conference to share learning and celebrate achievements.

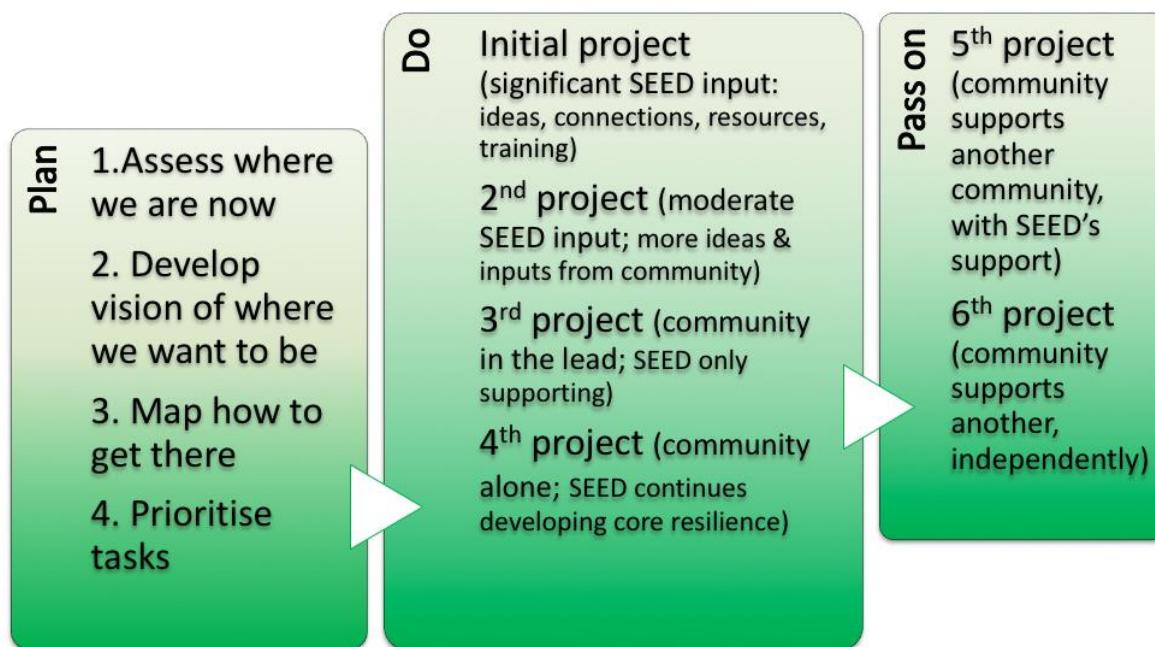
Over the next 5 years, SEED will reinforce the goal of working itself out of a job, focusing its efforts on the health and resilience of whole communities. In practice this will involve giving more attention to the development of a community’s shared vision, values, resources,

transferable skills (especially problem-solving) and responsibilities – all the ‘ingredients’ necessary for them to improve their own quality of life – than it will to the development of specific skills (e.g. agriculture, carpentry) in a few members.

It’s important to acknowledge that each community will be in a different starting place. Some will have some of the building blocks for resilient sustainable development already; others will need aid urgently before any longer-term development work can begin. Culture and behaviour change can take a long time, so it is important to begin on these as soon as basic needs are met, and to continue with their development as the foundation of everything else.

Model

SEED will always build on what is already there in a community, e.g. tradition, culture, natural resources, education, skills. SEED’s role is to guide and catalyse the community’s development, according to [our model](#), simplified in the diagram below. SEED will gradually hand over more and more responsibility to the community until they are not only able to undertake development projects unsupported, but they are able to assist other communities to go through the same process.



Illustrative examples

The ‘projects’ referred to in the diagram above will vary from community to community, determined by and with each community. From experience, they are likely to include the following (noting that these are merely illustrative examples):

Crisis Support (6 months max)

SEED is a development organisation, not a humanitarian one. However, considering the current volatile political, economic and social conditions in Zimbabwe, it is sometimes necessary to provide short term, focused support to communities – either as the first project we work on together, or following a crisis that occurs whilst we are working together. Crisis support provided by SEED will last approximately 2-6 months, to allow communities to get back on the path of self-sufficiency following events such as cholera, flooding or chronic food insecurity. Responses will be through:

- Partnership and networking with agencies who provide emergency aid
- Signposting communities to where they can access resources
- Provision of emergency aid (e.g. food, healthcare) using a small SEED crisis budget, to be used when clear conditions are met, including where other providers are not available
- Support to communities to progress to medium and longer term holistic development as opportunities and conditions improve

Development Programming

SEED's development programmes will focus on the main issues that are facing communities in the medium-long term, aiming to sustainably improve quality of life and resilience. Illustrative examples have been grouped into themes below for ease of reference. However, it is important to note that many of the themes are interlinked and therefore, in practice, projects aiming at holistic community development will often not fit neatly into one category.

- **Community resilience** - training will include crucial foundations for community resilience such as problem-solving, communication, planning, collaboration, innovation, entrepreneurship, leadership and governance.
- **Environmental protection and sustainability** - understanding and managing natural resources effectively, e.g. stewardship of indigenous forests, renewable energy, rainwater harvesting.
- **Vocational skills, employment and income generation** – future programming will consider the needs of the whole community (i.e. ensuring development of a range of skills that are needed locally), as well as the aptitudes and interests of individuals. Support could include vocational skills training, access to markets and finance, business and financial skills training.
- **Community health** – this may include helping communities to understand their own health, and resources for health, as individuals and as a group; to prevent common



diseases through behaviour change; to improve **Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH)** infrastructure; to set up peer support structures for carers.

- **Food Production and improving agricultural methods** – this may include increased community knowledge on methods such climate-smart agriculture, natural resource management (link to environment), cooperatives, seed banks, processing techniques, and an improved understanding of nutrition.
- **Education** – in addition to supporting communities to access quality education for their children, SEED will support communities to consider a variety of options for formal and informal education for all ages, to ensure that what is learned is relevant, practical and mindful in the local context. SEED has ideas for a new approach to education, covering many of the themes outlined in this strategy, that we will look to pilot and develop after piloting our main model for community development. In the meantime, some elements of the approach may be useful to communities on a small scale, e.g. as after-school clubs.

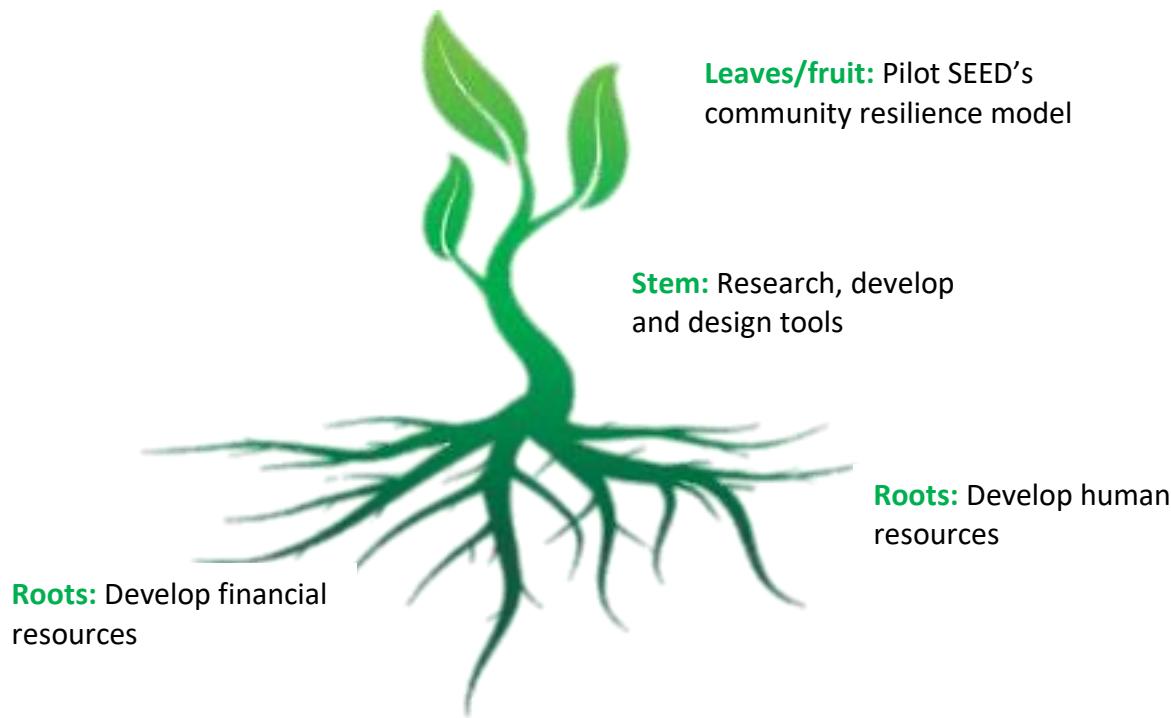
Community consultant

SEED does not aim to develop expertise in all the above sectors. Instead, we will partner with others who already specialise in each of them. Coming back to the idea of SEED as a *community consultant*, our role is as facilitator, coordinator, advisor. We form the connections and ensure that the development is holistic. The only one of the themes listed above in which SEED aims to develop specialist expertise is the first: development of skills to build ‘foundations for resilience’. This is ‘life skills’ with a difference: the focus will be on the whole community rather than the individual. It will include models for community leadership, participation and cohesion, and structures that ensure equity, inclusion, and resilience.

All projects like those in the illustrative examples above, implemented with communities, will be only part of the story. They will be stepping stones on the journey to **holistic sustainable development and resilience**. We plan to enable whole communities to become more resilient, so that not only are their members’ needs met and rights upheld in the short-term, but they are more likely to maintain this quality of life following a change in circumstances, whether that change is considered a disaster (e.g. drought, floods) or not (e.g. changed market demand for their main produce).

Strategic priorities

In order to achieve SEED's vision, the strategic priorities over the next five years are illustrated in the diagram below, and expanded in the four paragraphs that follow:



[NB. The numbering of the four strategic priorities below is simply for ease of reference; it does not imply a chronological order. As illustrated above, priorities 2-4 all underpin and facilitate priority 1, just as the roots and stem of a plant support its leaves / fruit.]

1. Pilot SEED's community resilience model

To date, only parts of SEED's community resilience model (as described under 'vision' above) have been properly trialled. SEED will now pilot, monitor and evaluate the complete SEED community development model in at least two communities, with a refreshed focus on the resilience of the whole community, in order to provide proof of concept. Evidence will be collected to evaluate both the impact and the process. Unexpected barriers, outcomes and successes will be documented. Communities' perspectives will be central to evaluating the whole process. The pilot will be an active learning process, for SEED as well as for the communities.

2. Research, develop and design tools

In order to effectively implement and monitor the pilot, new and adapted operational and monitoring tools will need to be developed. In particular, this will include manuals / training tools on community resilience (e.g. on problem solving, community governance), and



monitoring and evaluation tools (e.g. on resilience), to enable communities and SEED to track overall progress towards community resilience. A systematic approach to monitoring and evaluation for all SEED's projects and programmes will allow SEED to assess, monitor, evaluate and learn from its programmes, always feeding learning into new decisions and designs.

3. Develop human resources

The right people and structures are needed, in both Zimbabwe and the UK, in order to achieve the vision. The current (2017-18) resources are not sufficient to achieve the vision outlined above. Therefore, the trustees will undertake a review of SEED's human resources, including trustees, staff, and volunteers in both countries. The review will also include how partnerships can be developed with alumni from SEED's programmes and other organisations with complementary skills, experience and purpose.

4. Develop financial resources

At least some of the human resources in Priority 3 above will need funding, and there will be other costs associated with developing operational tools (Priority 2) and piloting the model (Priority 1). All of these initiatives will be costed, and a new fundraising plan will be developed to build on SEED's existing base of wonderful committed supporters. The plan is likely to include expanding the number of regular donors, requesting larger donations from individuals with the capability to give them, and securing grants from more private trusts and foundations.

We will achieve these four strategic priorities first by developing an operational plan, to include measures of success against which progress can be monitored, and then by completing a pilot of the SEED model of community resilience by the end of 2023. Process, results and learning will be documented alongside recommendations for further development and roll-out.

The SEED Project Trustees, December 2018