An Outcomes Evaluation of a Lean Season Assistance Programme in the Chivi District, Zimbabwe

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Abstract— *This is an outcomes evaluation of the lean season assistance programme (LSAP) implemented by World Food Programme (WFP) as the funding partner and Caritas Zimbabwe as the cooperating partner after establishing an acute food shortage affecting 55 523 vulnerable people who desperately needed food assistance in Chivi District. Some households were engaging in negative coping strategies to manage extreme food shortages affecting them. The objectives of the LSAP intervention programme were: to alleviate acute food shortages; to improve nutrition and income for households; to improve gender issues and child protection; and to provide sustainable coping strategies for the vulnerable communities in Chivi District. A mixed method for data collection was employed, namely questionnaire, interview, document analysis and observation to evaluate the outcomes of this intervention. The study employed the survey methodology to collect data key for this evaluation. The study findings established that the LSAP was very successful with a success rate of 93%. The study population of 55 523 vulnerable people in Chivi District were no longer food insecure as they were now able to enjoy three meals a day compared to the two, one or in some cases no meal at all. Some children who had dropped from school were now able to go back to school. There was a reduction of early child marriages and fewer cases reported of women and child abuse. Prostitution was also reduced as single women were empowered with more positive coping strategies such as savings (mikando). The vulnerable also received increased knowledge in farming and identifying and reporting the fall armyworm to local leadership, the District Administrator and Agritex Offices. However, the evaluation study recommended that although the LSAP was very successful, the vulnerable households in Chivi District were not yet ready to be weaned by Caritas as they needed more time to establish their small businesses so that they could be self-sufficient. The study also recommended that Caritas should also embrace those households which had been food secure before the LSAP launch as they had regressed to being vulnerable through food insecurity. The study was also able to contribute knowledge by coming up with a proposed Red Zone – Green Zone Framework which shows the graduation of vulnerable households from a position of danger, denoted by red to a position of sustainability, denoted by green. The green part shows the positive outcomes achieved.*

Keywords— *Outcomes evaluation, Lean Season Assistance Programme, lean Acute food shortages, vulnerable, outcomes, coping strategies.*

I. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to conduct an outcomes evaluation of the lean season assistance programme implemented by Caritas Zimbabwe (Caritas) in rural Chivi District of Masvingo Province in Zimbabwe. Caritas is a cooperating partner responsible for implementing programmes in partnership with the World Food Programme (WFP) as the funding partner. Its mandate in Zimbabwe includes integral development, food security, emergency relief, research for advocacy and informed programming, respect for human rights, child protection and support for proper stewardship of the planet's environment and resources. The researcher has since been introduced to the programme's key stakeholders to elicit their support during the evaluation process. The study first introduces the study setting in order to have a clear understanding of the reason why the study is being undertaken.

The Project Setting

This section begins by showing the geographical setting of Chivi District in the Province of Masvingo, on the map of Zimbabwe, Figure 1 below. This helps to appreciate why Chivi District is perennially experiencing food insecurity and all the attendant challenges that arise from food insecurity. Some of the challenges related to food insecurity in Chivi are increases in hunger, malnutrition, domestic violence (GBV), school dropouts, drug abuse, selling of productive assets, prostitution, breakdown of marriages, early child marriages, premature deaths, child-headed families, reducing household meals and desertions of families to run away from pressures at home. Figure 1 below shows the geographical setting of Chivi District, which is the study area sharing borders with Masvingo, Shurugwi, Zvishavane, Chiredzi, and Rutenga.

Figure 1. Map of Chivi District

The map above, Figure 1, shows the study area Chivi District in Masvingo Province (Also see Appendix 1) which is located in the drought-prone region of the country and is occupied by subsistence farmers who live from hand to mouth and are greatly affected by any slight changes of the climate. The scope of the problem statement below characterizes the programme setting and provides specific quantitative data to reflect the extent of the problems being addressed by the

intervention of the lean season assistance programme implemented by Caritas as the cooperating partner and World Food Programme (WFP) as the funding partner.

Scope of The Problem

It was estimated that 149,365 people in Chivi District would be food insecure during the peak hunger period 2019/20 Lean Season Period (ZimVac, 2019). Of these, Caritas targeted 55 523 people. Chivi District lies in regions 4 and 5 where a greater proportion of food insecure households are found and also where crop production is low and households fail to meet their food and dietary requirements all year round. According to ZimVac (2018/19) assessment, Chivi is one of the districts with a high cereal insecurity prevalence of 84.7%. The 2018-2019 cropping season was characterised by poor rainfall distribution. According to Agritex Report (2018/2019), Chivi District experienced a delay in its cropping season, which stretched to end of December 2018 and beginning of January 2019, without meaningful rains. The normal average for the District ranges from 400-500mm but during the 2018-2019 rainfall season, only 300mm was received which could not sustain crops. The area planted was low and because of that, the planted crop in the same district was then affected by the fall armyworm that wreaked havoc to the crops. According to ZimVac Rural Livelihoods Assessment Report (2019), 76.2% of households in Chivi had maize crops affected by the fall armyworm. In addition to these challenges, some farmers failed to access inputs due to economic challenges facing the country that led them to use retained seeds and failed to purchase fertilizers and chemicals. These factors contributed to poor harvests to no harvest at all in the Chivi District. According to the information gathered by Zimvac, many young people were now moving out of the District in search of greener pastures and the other coping strategies are now to sell beans and to reduce household meals. In extreme cases, some women engage in prostitution because there is nothing else to sell as coping strategy. Table 1 shows the statistics of food insecurity in Zimbabwe, and Masvingo Province, is among the provinces suffering from food insecurity.

TABLE 1. Food Insecurity in Zimbabwe

Province	Rural Population (Projected 2018)	IPC Phase 1		IPC Phase 2		IPC Phase 3		IPC Phase 4		IPC Phase 3+4 or equivalent	
		# people	% pop.	# people	% pop.	# people	% pop.	# people	% pop.	# people	% pop.
Manicaland	1,602,000	547,000	34%	498,000	31%	333,000	21%	224,000	14%	557,000	35%
Mashonaland Central	1,166,000	556,000	47%	255,000	22%	243,000	21%	112,000	10%	355,000	30%
Mashonaland East	1,301,000	471,000	36%	439,000	34%	271,000	21%	120,000	9%	391,000	30%
Mashonaland West	1,229,000	604,000	49%	333,000	27%	218,000	18%	74,000	6%	292,000	24%
Masvingo	1,451,000	546,000	38%	464,000	32%	310,000	21%	131,000	9%	441,000	30%
Matabeleland North	719,000	292,000	41%	174,000	24%	149,000	21%	104,000	14%	253,000	35%
Matabeleland South	647,000	314,000	48%	166,000	26%	111,000	17%	56,000	9%	167,000	26%
Midlands	1,305,000	338,000	26%	544,000	42%	256,000	20%	167,000	13%	423,000	32%
Grand Total	9,420,000	3,668,000	39%	2,873,000	31%	1,892,000	20%	987,000	10%	2,879,000	31%

Given the results of the 2018/2019 poor harvests, there was need to support the affected households with direct food aid and economic means to access food from the market, hence the intervention of Caritas with the LSA Programme to help address these challenges facing some households within the District. There was also need for Caritas to support livelihood options for targeted populations in Chivi District to reduce further depletion of productive assets. The following programme description provides the main goal, objectives and outcomes to help address the situation through LSAP in Chivi District.

Project Description

The programme under study is Lean Season Assistance Programme (LSAP) in Chivi District of Masvingo Province. The programme is being implemented by Caritas Zimbabwe (Caritas) as the cooperating partner, providing all the logistical support to the programme. The programme has three main goals, four main objectives and fourteen sub-objectives. All these are feeding into the main goal as discussed below.

Caritas LSAP Main Goal

The Caritas LSAP main goal is "To strengthen resilience and ensure food security for 55 523 vulnerable people in Chivi District from August 2019 to April 2020 lean season period". The discussion now gives the Caritas LSAP objective it wished to realize with its intervention programme arising from the main goal above.

Caritas LSAP Objective

To improve nutrition and income for vulnerable households through capacity building in basic nutrition and health, climate smart agriculture, crop and livestock production, Internal Savings and Lending Schemes (ISALS), and wetland management and the environment in Chivi District.

The Scope of The Research

The evaluation of the outcomes of the Lean Season Assistance Programme in Chivi District will cover all the key evaluation areas of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability. In addition, it will also take into account the

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coherence and coverage of the programme. It will however not concentrate much on process evaluation because that is a separate study for another day. These key evaluation areas are critical in providing the width, and depth of the outcomes evaluation process (Nonie: 2010). A Theory of Change and Logic Model for the Lean Season Assistance Programme in Chivi by Caritas will guide the outcomes evaluation in many ways throughout the evaluation process. An outline for developing success metrics that track the evolution and impact of a project over time may be obtained by utilizing a Theory of Change approach in conjunction with an associated project logic model. These in turn need to be narrowed down with pertinent assessment questions that are determined by project participants, funders, and other important stakeholders. Relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability—the five assessment criteria for development interventions—as stated in the OEDC/DAC evaluation standards offer a solid foundation.

Different evaluation kinds (and/or methodologies) can be identified based on the types of questions they aim to address. For this reason, it's critical to establish clear expectations at the outset of a review. A logic model is useful in that it offers a project outline that facilitates the construction of various success metrics that track the evolution and effects of the project over time. As seen in Figure 2 below, Figure illustrates how various evaluation techniques and methodologies can be applied to measure various aspects of the entire project or change endeavor.
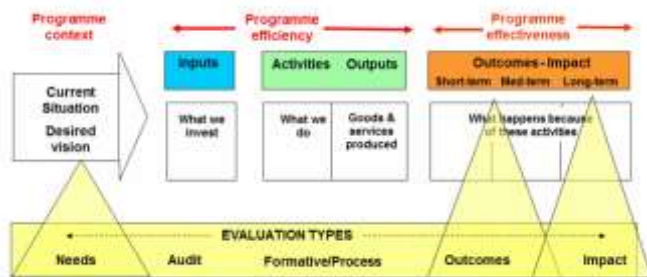

Figure 2. The Logic Model

According to Kaplan and Garrett (2005), "A logic model is a graphic display or 'map' of the relationship between a programme's resources, activities, and intended results, which also identifies the programme's underlying theory and assumptions."

Essentially, a logic model could be suitable for an outcomes evaluation by setting out the relationships and assumptions, between what an intervention programme such as the LSAP in Chivi will do and what changes it expects to deliver (Hayes et al., 2011) to the target community. In such a context, an evaluation becomes a plan that is followed in order to assess a programme's performance.

The studied literature also demonstrates that a logic model can be very helpful in identifying discrepancies between a program's constituent parts, its underlying presumptions, and its expected results (Helitzer et al., 2010). Defined in this way, a logic model becomes ideal in measuring the performance of a

programme such as the LSAP in Chivi District since it can be used to identify the gaps in performance from the original objectives set.

The process of developing a logic model helps to define the various elements of an intervention programme, which create the foundation for measurement and evaluation (Gugui and Rodriguez-Campos: 2007).

Programme Theory

The programme theory in in Figure 3 below is arising from the logframe in Figure 2 above.

The LSAP will deliver the main goal in Chivi which is to strengthen the resilience and ensure food security for 55 523 vulnerable people spread across the 32 wards in Chivi by April 2020. To achieve this goal, the beneficiaries should have: increased access to food, receive increased support for livelihood options, realize increased reduction in cases of malnutrition, receive increased awareness on abuse of women and children, knowledge on accessing agricultural inputs, receive increased knowledge on gender and child protection. The outcomes/results of this programme are the intermediate goals LSAP delivers. These outcomes are in turn delivered by the outputs namely: food aid baskets received, vulnerable people fed, cash aid received, vulnerable people trained, livelihood options received, vulnerable people supported, and children free of malnutrition. These outputs are key in delivering the outcomes above. The outputs are in turn delivered by the following activities: food transfer modalities, CBT transfer modalities, Capacity strengthening transfer modalities, Technical/Specialist services, CP Direct support modalities, and management consultancy. After presenting the programme theory of the LSAP for Chivi District, the study now critiques the programme theory so that future programme theories are more robust.

Outcomes Evaluation in Context

Outcomes evaluation is the assessment done to measure the final results of a programme (Simon: 2020). It is the evaluation done by organizations for measuring the outcome or end result of an activity done in delivering the required change beneficial to communities under consideration. Barrett (2013) points out that outcomes evaluation mostly focuses on inputs from the participants and how the activity transforms those inputs to deliver outputs and the required change in communities.

Outcomes evaluation also helps to understand how well the objectives of a program were met (Wholey, Hatry, (2010). The evaluation thus becomes effective by depicting in which direction the intervention programme can further go based on the outcome or results of the current programme. This effectively becomes the essence of carrying out the LSAP outcomes evaluation in Chivi District so that a way forward can be determined with credible facts on the ground gathered. In this respect, the outcomes evaluation becomes an indicator of establishing the performance of the program in the first place. The review of literature has identified four advantages of an outcomes evaluation as follows:
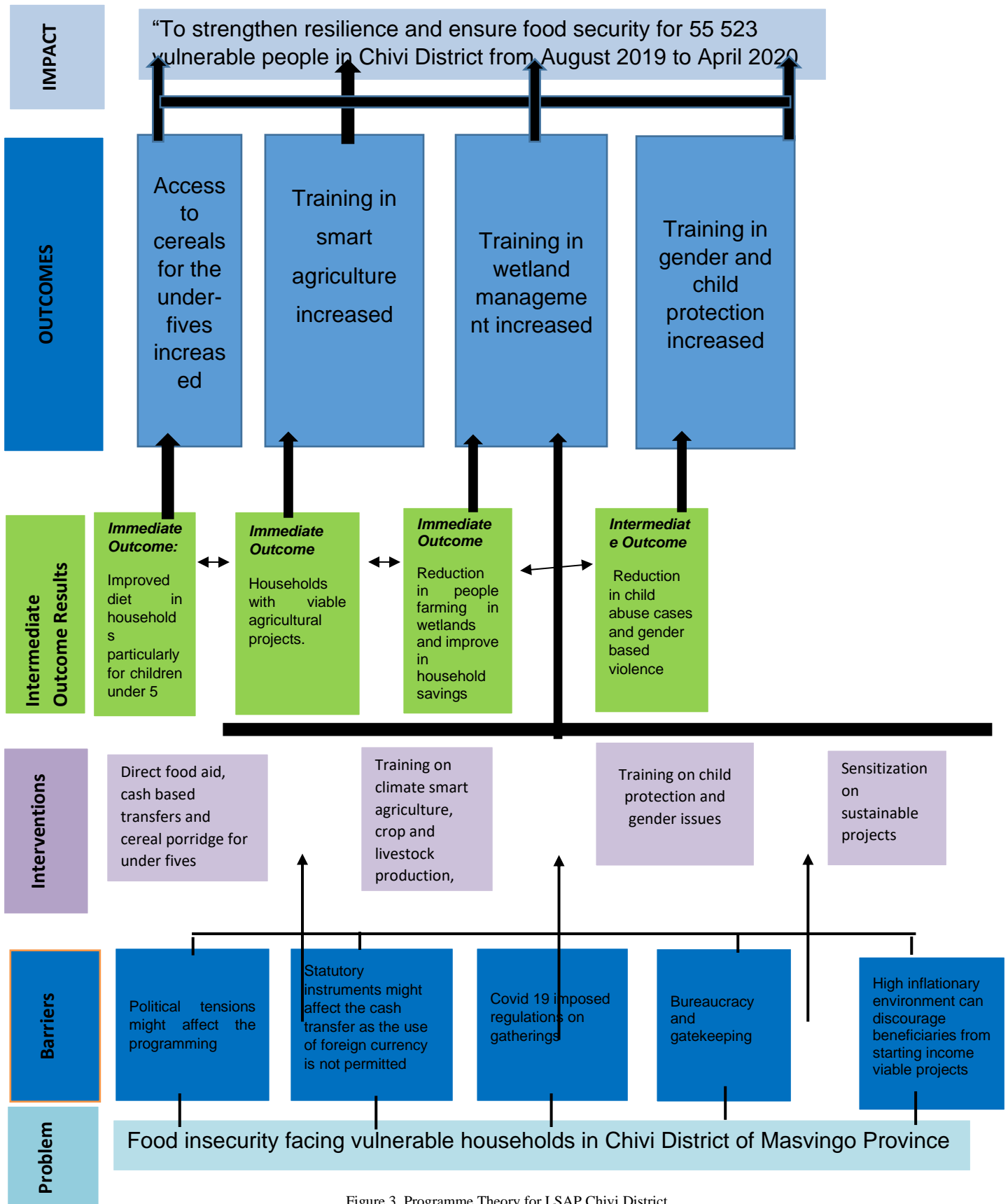
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Figure 3. Programme Theory for LSAP Chivi District

Advantages of Outcome Evaluation

The first advantage of outcomes evaluation identified is that it helps a programme such as the LSAP in Chivi understand the impact of the program and how essential the prospect of program replication is in future intervention efforts in other communities that require similar assistance and sharing similar characteristics (OED: 2005).

The second advantage of the outcomes evaluation is that it is able to establish the true costs of the intervention programme and determine if the results achieved can evidently influence the course of future intervention programmes in other communities (Kellogg Foundation: 1998).

The third advantage of outcomes evaluation is that the cost of the current intervention programme such as LSAP in Chivi established as a result of this evaluation helps to understand the present status and future environment of the intervention programme and its operations (Weiss: 1998).

The fourth advantage of the outcomes evaluation is that it also helps to understand the evaluation of the desired attributes that the intervention programme offers to the affected community (Torres, Preskill, Piontek: 1996). By interviewing existing programme clients the programme gets to know that outcomes evaluation validates new and desired programme outcomes. Now that the outcomes evaluation has been put in context, the study turns to reviewing literature on outcomes evaluation conceptual framework. A review of such a conceptual model will inform whether there is a different perspective of looking at the model with a view to improve it for better understanding.

Data Collection

The data collection instrument used to collect data from the LSAP has been designed in line with the recommendations of Leeuw and Vaessen (2009) who say that the changes in welfare for a particular group of people can be observed by doing "*before and after*" studies. Leeuw and Vaessen (2009) go further to point out that if nothing else of importance happened during the period under study, attribution is so clear that there is no need to resort to anything other than before versus after to determine this outcome.

Outcome 1: Economic Access to Food Improved
Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

From the expected 352 responses targeted by the project only 275 were reached giving 78% response rate, the table below shows the disaggregation of beneficiaries.

TABLE 2. Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Category	Actual Responses
Male adult	15
Female adult	28
Male youth	21
Female youth	23
Physically challenged	30
Widowed	31
Child headed/Orphaned	29
Single	30
Divorced	23
Polygamous	21
Deserted	24
Total	**275**

Strategies Used to Access Food on Inception of LSAP In Chivi District.

All the respondents strongly agreed that they were two strategies used to access food on inception of LSAP in Chivi District. This suggests that all respondents are aware of the food transfer modalities to access food in the LSAP in Chivi District. They should also therefore be aware of any changes and adjustments that could take place in terms of delivering food aid to all the vulnerable people within the District. This shows that the communication system in the LSAP is managed well. This can only be attributed to the cooperating partner who is in fact the implementing partner, Caritas Zimbabwe.
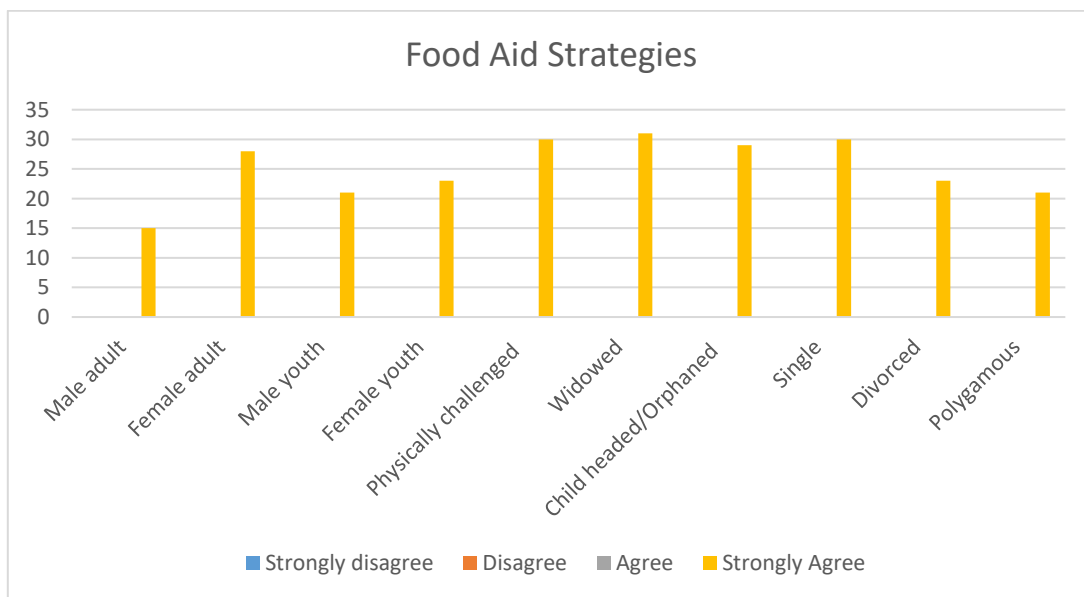

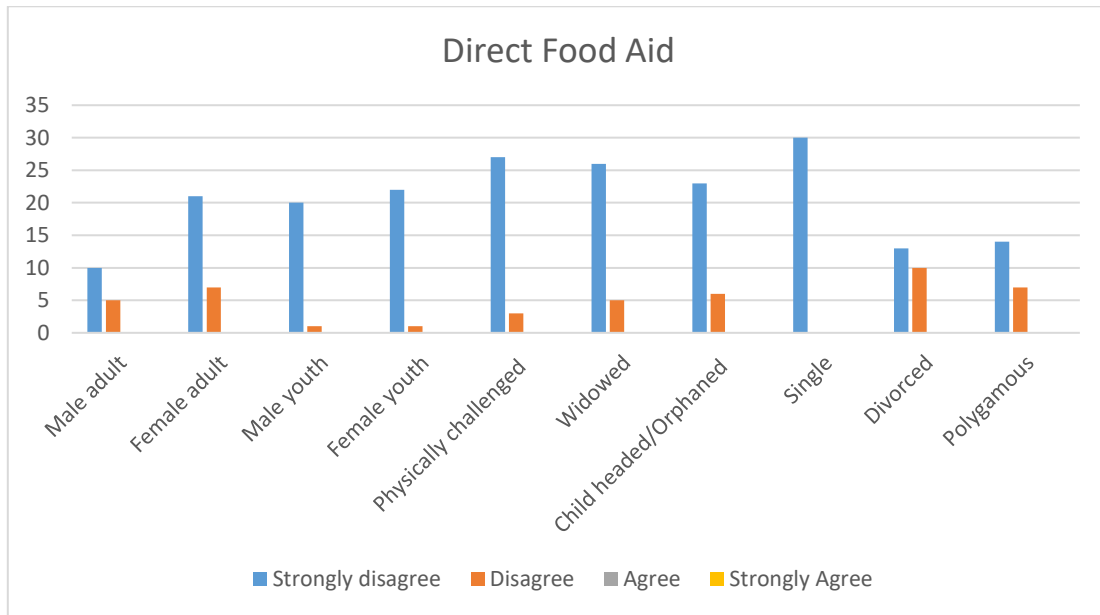Figure 4. Food Aid Strategies

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Direct Food Aid

Figure 5. Direct food aid

All the respondents strongly disagreed with the statement that they are not receiving food aid from the LSAP. What this means then is that they strongly agreed that they in fact receive food aid from the LSAP. This clearly shows that the vulnerable are able to pick the truth and would not want to portray a bad image of the cooperating partner who has made a change in their lives.

Lessons Learnt

The first lesson learnt in this study is reviewing extant literature critical in establishing a solid starting point in a research such as the evaluation of a lean season assistance programme (Mulrow, 1987). This study was able to benefit from a study of three countries that carried out similar studies in Lesotho, Uganda and Bangladesh. The study also learnt that literature review is able to determine the extent to which a specific research such as the evaluation of a lean season assistance programme is able to reveal any interpretable patterns. One such pattern was identified by the Rural Transformation Framework in that the progression of outcomes as a result of lean season assistance programme interventions is a gradual process which goes back and forth in non-linear fashion and does not happen in a straight line as reflected by the Rural Transformation Framework. The other lesson learnt is that the literature review helps in generating new frameworks and theories (Pare et al, 2015). This study has come up with a Red Zone – Green Zone Framework to depict the effect of a successful lean season intervention in moving the affected community from danger, represented by the red colour, to safety, represented by the green colour as shown in Figure below.

Figure 6. Red Zone – Green Zone Framework As Practiced By Lsap Chivi

Red Zone is showing negative aspects while the green zone shows some positive aspects.

II. CONCLUSION

The outcomes evaluation has recorded 93% achievement level for the Lean Season Assistance Programme in Chivi District. It has failed to achieve one outcome only, which is No. 2 (Improved cash transfers to access food aid). The reason for the failure to achieve is that national economic issues such as national policies that regulate the use of foreign currency and the supply of money on the market are outside the control of Caritas. An outcome success level of 93% is a very good achievement by any standard. All things being equal, Caritas could be preparing for an exit strategy from Chivi with this outstanding performance, but the operating environment obtaining in Zimbabwe is very fluid and unpredictable.

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