

If a household is seed secure, does it mean it is food secure too?

Dr Bulisani Ncube
October 2021



Background

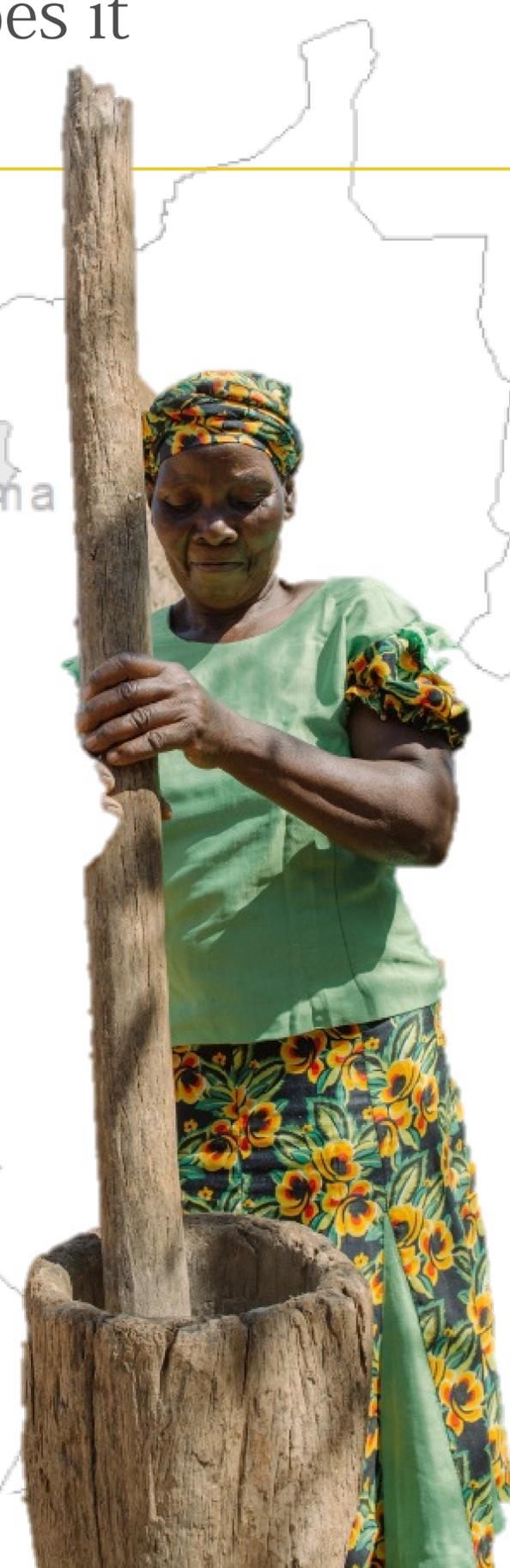
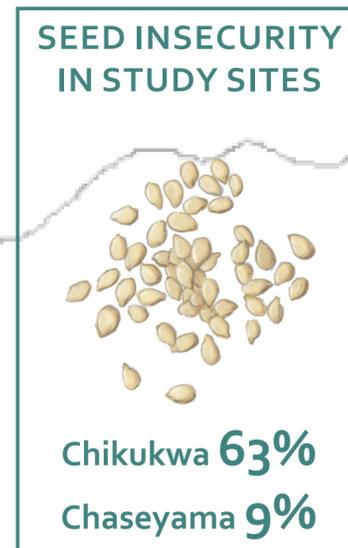
Agricultural production in southern Africa has been increasing, yet the number of people who are unable to access adequate food continues to rise. Smallholder crop producers often suffer from a lack of appropriate seed as well as high levels of food insecurity – but are these two rural phenomena connected? To better understand these links (or lack of links), this study was conducted in eastern Zimbabwe, across Chikukwa and Chaseyama Wards in Chimanimani District.

The relationship between seed security and food security

Farmers in this study could be divided into different categories:

- some had adequate seed and food
- some had adequate food but had challenges with their seed
- some had adequate seed but had challenges with obtaining sufficient food
- some had challenges in obtaining both seed and food

This clearly illustrates that interventions such as community seed production, seed aid, and input subsidies do not automatically result in improved food security.



Farmer-led seed systems play a leading role

Seed sources led by farmers such as own saved seed, seed bought at local markets, and seed acquired through social networks, were more resilient, reliable, and readily available than those supplied through formal channels. The farmers who were able to obtain most of their seed in time for planting were invariably the ones who relied on farmer-led seed sources.

Enablers and constrainers of seed and food security

A number of factors at the household level play a role in either enabling or constraining seed and food security, including farming practices, such as crop production and diversity, differentiated seed and food plots, and farming longevity. The human, natural, economic, and social assets of households, such as social networks, water resources, employment, and geographic differences, such as physical and agroecological characteristics, are also important.

“My parents in Bocha Marange used to grow plenty of pearl millet and sorghum that were harvested into large granaries. This lasted my family for three years so that even when drought years followed, we did not lack food. I got the seed and learnt these farming practices from my parents and so I am now using them to ensure that we are also able to harvest enough food most years.”
(Farmer, life case-history interview, Chaseyama, September 2017)