



STRATEGIC PLAN
2026–2030

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LETTER FROM THE BOARD

It is with great pride and confidence that we join our Executive Director in presenting SAFIRE’s Strategic Plan for 2026–2030. This plan is a bold yet grounded roadmap, one that builds upon three decades of learning and practice, and reaffirms our collective commitment to community-driven conservation and sustainable livelihoods.

From our humble beginnings in the Tongogara Refugee Camp to our current position as a national leader in community-based natural resource management, SAFIRE’s journey has always been shaped by resilience, innovation, and deep partnerships. What makes SAFIRE unique is its unwavering belief in the power of local communities to be custodians of their environments and drivers of their own development. The evidence of thriving [Ma] enterprises, restored ecosystems, and strengthened community institutions across Zimbabwe is testimony to this approach.

As a Board, we are inspired by the ambition of this strategy—to restore more than 50,000 hectares of land, expand nature-based enterprises, and equip local institutions to govern natural resources equitably and sustainably. These commitments reflect both urgency and opportunity. Urgency, because climate change and environmental degradation continue to threaten lives and livelihoods; and opportunity, because empowered communities are proving every day that restoration and conservation can yield dignity, prosperity, and resilience.

We recognize that these aspirations will require steadfast partnerships, significant investment, and continued innovation. The Board remains fully committed to providing strong governance, strategic oversight, and unwavering support to ensure that SAFIRE not only delivers on this plan but also adapts effectively to a rapidly changing context.

On behalf of the Board, I extend our deepest gratitude to SAFIRE’s dedicated staff, our funding and technical partners, and most importantly, the communities whose trust, leadership, and determination anchor our mission. I also wish to acknowledge Maliasili for their instrumental role in facilitating this participatory strategy development process.

We invite all stakeholders—government, donors, private sector, and civil society—to walk with us in this journey and bring this vision to life. Together, we can make thriving ecosystems and resilient communities the foundation of Zimbabwe’s future.

With commitment and resolve,



**EDWIN FARAI CHITSA (MR) –
CHAIRPERSON**



**SIBONGINKOSI GUGULETHU
MUNGONI (MRS)- VICE
CHAIRPERSON**

LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



It is with great pride and renewed commitment that I present SAFIRE's Strategic Plan for the next five years. This document is more than a blueprint—it is a reflection of the voices, values, and aspirations of the communities we serve, and a reaffirmation of our mission to build resilient livelihoods through sustainable natural resource management.

Since our founding in 1994, SAFIRE has evolved from responding to humanitarian needs in the Tongogara Refugee Camp to becoming a nationally recognized leader in community-based natural resource management. Along this journey, we have witnessed firsthand the power of local

communities to restore ecosystems, revive degraded landscapes, and transform nature into a source of dignity and opportunity. Our work—rooted in collaboration, local ownership, and environmental stewardship—has impacted tens of thousands of households across Zimbabwe, creating sustainable livelihoods and conserving biodiversity in some of the country's most fragile ecosystems.

Yet we recognize that the challenges facing rural communities today are more complex than ever. Climate change, economic instability, and increased pressure on natural resources demand new approaches, stronger partnerships, and a deeper commitment to innovation. This strategic plan lays out an ambitious but achievable path forward: to expand our nature-based enterprises, restore more than 50,000 hectares of land, and strengthen local institutions to become powerful drivers of change.

At the heart of this strategy is our unwavering belief that when communities are empowered to own, manage, and benefit from their natural resources, both people and nature thrive. We will continue to invest in inclusive and incentive-driven models that place local people at the center of restoration, conservation, and development efforts.

I extend my deepest gratitude to our staff, partners, donors, and, most importantly, the communities and government departments who have walked this journey with us. Your trust and collaboration make this work possible.

I would like to also express my sincere gratitude to Maliasili, whose facilitation, guidance, and unwavering support were instrumental in shaping this strategy. Their partnership enabled a process that was both participatory and focused, helping us align our ambitions with the realities and aspirations of the communities we serve.

Together, let us build a future where restored landscapes, thriving ecosystems, and resilient livelihoods are not the exception, but the norm.

With determination and hope,

Estella Toperesu
Executive Director
SAFIRE



OUR JOURNEY

SAFIRE is a local Zimbabwean non-governmental organization that works with local communities to ensure the sustainable management of their natural resources, turning these natural assets into sources of long-term benefit and improved well-being. Building on this foundation, our approach combines natural resources management with economic growth, supporting communities in developing sustainable livelihoods and economic practices that generate lasting benefits for people and the environment. Through initiatives such as ecosystem restoration, sustainable livelihoods development, and economic empowerment activities, we harness the potential of the environment to create opportunities for rural communities to improve well-being and build resilience. Thus, through investing in community-led ecosystems, biodiversity, and natural resource management, we improve livelihoods, resilience, and economic outcomes, ultimately strengthening rural communities to restore and conserve biodiversity.

The Southern Alliance for Indigenous Resources (SAFIRE) was established in 1994, evolving from the Fuelwood Crisis Consortium (FCC), a coalition formed in 1992 by local, government, and international organizations to combat deforestation and environmental degradation around Mozambican refugee camps in Zimbabwe. Building on successful interventions including woodland rehabilitation, SAFIRE expanded its community-Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) interventions across Zimbabwe and the region. Guided by the belief that rural livelihoods are directly tied to environmental health, SAFIRE collaborates with local communities, NGOs, and government institutions to promote participatory resource management, build local institutional capacity, and support nature-based enterprises.

Our experience in Tongogara marked a turning point in our approach. We recognized that these challenges were not unique to the refugee camp, but reflective of broader issues in Zimbabwe's rural communities, especially in the arid and semi-arid. We therefore shifted our focus towards supporting local communities in restoring their environments, as a means to

address livelihoods challenges. Building on this conviction, our work is now rooted in a deep understanding of the intricate relationship between people and their immediate environment.

In 1996 we expanded our scope nationally, with a specific focus on the arid and semi-arid of Zimbabwe. This strategic shift was motivated by the growing needs in marginal areas nationwide and the government's rollout of the Communal Areas Management Program for Indigenous Resources (CAMPFIRE). Through the CAMPFIRE program, local communities could benefit from natural resources in their areas and SAFIRE played a significant role in supporting local authorities and organizing the respective rural communities to participate in wildlife and non-timber forest products (NTFP) value chains to derive economic benefits.

As SAFIRE continued to evolve, we underwent significant transformation. We broadened our mission, adopting a regional focus and established an office in Zambia between 1999 and 2005. This expansion was facilitated through our involvement with the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC). During this period, SAFIRE's benefit-driven and nature-based enterprise development approach to natural resource management became stronger. We established a NTFP research unit that focused on technology and non-timber forest products development. This was before the 2007/8 world economic recession, which also affected Zimbabwe's economy. The recession forced SAFIRE to scale down operations, and refocus back on Zimbabwe. We managed to survive the economic challenges, though with a lot of scars, but now more determined than ever to continue and expand community based natural resource management, driven by our incentive and nature-based enterprise development approach to restore degraded landscapes for the benefit of people and nature. We have taken into account the added implications of climate change in exacerbating land degradation and livelihoods. We now intentionally support processes that mitigate climate change, such as climate smart agriculture and agroforestry, as critical for vulnerable rural communities.



THE CONTEXT

Community based conservation in Zimbabwe is guided by various laws and governance structures. The overarching framework is provided by the Environmental Management Act [Chapter 20:27], which outlines principles for environmental conservation and management, including sustainable use of natural resources and incentives for environmental protection. At the local level, this framework is operationalized through Environmental Sub-Committees (ESCs), which are established under the Rural District Councils Act [Chapter 29:13]. These sub-committees comprise elected local community members, ex-officio traditional leaders, and council representatives. ESCs work to identify environmental concerns, develop conservation plans, and implement sustainable natural resource management practices. The Rural District Councils Act specifically provides for environment committees and subcommittees to exercise functions relating to the environment and natural resources within wards and villages.

Furthermore, the Traditional Leaders Act [Chapter 29:17] recognizes the role of traditional leaders (chiefs and village heads) in promoting environmental conservation and sustainable use of natural resources within their respective communities.

The Forest Act [Chapter 19:05] is also a critical piece of legislation governing forest management in Zimbabwe. Its primary mandate is to provide for the administration, control and management of State forests through the Forestry Commission, the setting aside and protection of State forests, the protection of private forests, trees and forest produce, conservation of timber resources, and the regulation and control of activities involving forest resources.

In communal areas, the Communal Land Forest Produce Act [Chapter 19:04] provides the more specific legal framework for the regulation, protection and sustainable exploitation of forest produce. The Act recognises the rights of inhabitants of Communal Land to exploit forest produce for their own use, while placing restrictions on the exploitation of certain forest resources, including major forest produce in protected forest areas, reserved trees

and forest produce subject to licences or agreements. It also provides for the regulation of commercial exploitation of forest produce through licences, permits and agreements, and provides for the establishment and control of plantations and forest nurseries within Communal Land.

Together, these legal provisions provide a framework through which government institutions, rural district councils, traditional leaders and communities can support the conservation and sustainable management of forests and natural resources, while recognising the livelihood dependence of rural communities on forest produce.

The Forest Act, together with the Communal Land Forest Produce Act [Chapter 19:04] and other relevant legislation, provides a framework for regulated and sustainable utilisation of forest resources and forest produce. In communal areas, communities can derive livelihood benefits from sustainable use and sale of forest products such as timber, firewood, and non-timber forest products, subject to applicable regulations, licences, permits and agreements. Communities can also benefit from ecotourism and other forest-based enterprises where these are developed in accordance with relevant legal and environmental requirements. However, in practice, the realisation of these benefits has been limited due to various challenges such as lack of capacity, inadequate resources, limited access to markets, and unclear or weak benefit-sharing arrangements.

Despite conservation frameworks, several challenges persist owing to limited implementation capacity in marginal communities. Zimbabwe's lowveld region, characterized by arid landscapes and fragile ecosystems, continues to face severe environmental degradation. It has experienced decades of unsustainable land use practices, deforestation, and habitat destruction that have led to ecosystem degradation. This degradation is evident in the significant loss of forest cover, with a 30% decline between 1990 and 2015 (Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)). Furthermore, water quality has decreased by ~40% due to siltation and pollution (ZimStats, 2019). Biodiversity has also suffered, with a 25% decline and several species facing extinction (International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), 2020).

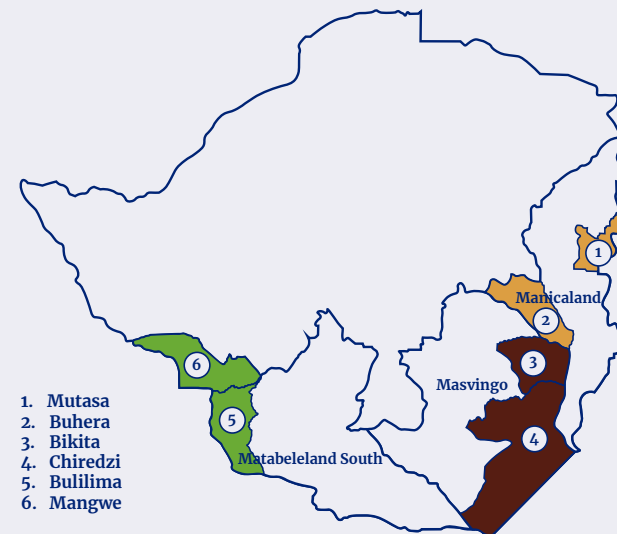
Consequences of this degradation have been far-reaching, with once-thriving forests and grasslands giving way to barren expanses of badlands. This transformation has exacerbated climate change impacts, including increased frequency and severity of droughts and floods in the lowveld, which have affected approximately 50% of the lowveld population (UNDP, 2019).



Where we work

To date, SAFIRE has operated in 7/8 non-metropolitan provinces excluding Mashonaland East. We are currently active in Manicaland, Masvingo, and Matabeleland South provinces - covering districts that include Buhera, Mutasa, Bikita, Chiredzi, Bulilima, and Mangwe. We target marginalized rural and peri-urban communities in the arid and semi-arid region. Characterized by low, erratic, and unreliable rainfall, these areas are prone to frequent climate-related shocks and stresses, including droughts and floods, which severely impede livelihoods.

PROVINCES AND DISTRICTS WHERE WE CURRENTLY WORK



Who we work with

SAFIRE collaborates with a diverse range of stakeholders, in Zimbabwe and internationally, to advance its mission of sustainable natural resource management and community development. Locally, we partner with rural communities, local government agencies, and civil society organizations to implement community-led natural resource management, sustainable eco-friendly agriculture, and forest conservation initiatives. Key national partners include the Ministry of Environment, Climate and Wildlife, the Ministry of Agriculture, Mechanisation and Water Resources Development, the Ministry of Women Affairs, Gender, & Small to Medium Enterprises, and the Ministry of energy and power and their related government agencies operating at the local level. These include Environmental Management Agency (EMA), Forestry Commission (FC) and Agricultural and Rural Development and Advisory Services (ARDAS), formally AGRITEX) among others. In each district we operate and partner with local authorities – Rural District Councils (RDCs) – who we support to advance community-led natural resources management and rural development.

Internationally, SAFIRE engages with global organizations, donors, and networks to access knowledge, funding, and technical assistance. Key international partners include the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), OXFAM, Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), Irish Aid, USAID, GOAL, LED, TDH, CARE, BMZ, World Vision, the African Forest Landscape Restoration Initiative (AFR100, CESVI), the Global Environment Facility (GEF), Diakonia and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

SAFIRE also participates in regional and global forums, such as International Land Coalition, Regional Sustainability Network and Clean Cooking Alliance to share best practices, influence policy, and stay abreast of emerging trends and innovations.



OUR IMPACT STORY

Nature-based enterprise development

We put great effort into creating sustainable businesses that utilize nature as a core element of product or service offering. These enterprises aim to contribute to environmental conservation and sustainable development while generating economic benefits as an incentive for conservation. Since 2014, SAFIRE has established five Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs) enterprises in Chimanimani (Baobab), Buhera (Honey), Hwange (Baobab), Beitbridge & Gwanda (Mopane worm) and Matobo (Marula). These interventions have yielded significant multiplier impacts, notably increasing income streams for participating communities. The enterprises directly benefited the 169 households that own them. And indirectly benefited approximately 25,000 community members who either purchase products from the enterprises or supply raw materials. For example, Chapanduka Honey produces an average of 500 kg monthly of processed honey monthly, along with honey-based products like candles, floor polish, and cosmetics, generating around USD\$2,000 in monthly revenue. These initiatives have significantly contributed to local economic development and sustainable woodland resource management.

The Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFP) enterprises now operate efficiently and independently, with increased private sector participation within the supply chain, demonstrating SAFIRE's ability to create sustainable, scalable, and impactful environmental and livelihood solutions.

Restoring ecosystems:

Restoration is a powerful tool for revitalizing degraded ecosystems, promoting biodiversity, and supporting human well-being. Through collaborative efforts with local communities, we restored ecosystems, promoted sustainable land use, and ensured the long-term health of landscapes. SAFIRE's forest conservation and reforestation efforts have protected and restored critical ecosystems such as wetlands and riverines, preserving biodiversity, and mitigating climate change. Our key achievements include:



Wetland ecosystem rehabilitation: We have supported local communities in rehabilitating a total of 13 hectares of wetland area across three districts, restoring vital habitats and ecosystem services. Some of the once dry wetlands are back to life supporting fish production, and have become main sources of water for livestock and nutrition gardens.

Forest protection: Approximately 40 000 ha of forests across all districts we have operated in are protected, promoting sustainable land use. The community leased the land to the Gonarezhou Trust, and are benefiting from proceeds of hunting safaris.

Farmer-managed natural resource management: We have worked closely with farmers to establish and manage cumulatively 415 hectares of land, promoting sustainable agriculture practices and enhancing ecosystem services. Farmers are generating income through the sale of roofing poles, mopane worm production, and honey production in their forest patches.



Tree planting: Through community conservation initiatives, such as sustainable forest management practices, and reforestation programs, SAFIRE has safeguarded habitats, watersheds, and ecosystem services. Our community-led tree planting initiatives have supported the planting of approximately 597,000 trees across six districts, covering over 238 hectares of land. For example, under the Zimbabwe Forest Restoration project SAFIRE collaborated with local communities to reclaim degraded areas by planting various tree species, including indigenous trees. Yields from these trees provide economic benefits, encouraging a culture of restoration while improving food security for the respective communities.





Tsotso stove: SAFIRE introduced Tsotso stoves, produced from local resources, reducing the rate of deforestation for firewood by 60%, in Buhera, Chimanimani, Chiredzi, Muzarabani, Zaka, Bikita and Chivi – saving an equivalent of approximately 145 hectares of tree cover through the tsotso stove intervention.

Catchment restoration initiatives, including damming streams, silt traps, barrages and planting vetiver grass, have protected approximately 6,021 hectares of land from erosion. Gully reclamation and contour establishment have improved soil and water conservation of over 1,200 hectares, increasing food production for more than 3,221 households in Buhera, Chimanimani and Beit Bridge.



**1,632 households
264 hectares irrigated**

Increased water access:

SAFIRE has significantly improved communities' access to water, food security, livelihoods, and enhanced climate change resilience. From 2014 to 2024, we implemented initiatives that benefited 1,632 households (approximately 7,092 people), providing access to water for irrigation, domestic, and economic use. Our projects, including the rehabilitation of irrigation schemes like Manjinji and Shashe, have enabled year-round crop cultivation on 264 hectares of land, significantly reducing dependence on forest products and vulnerability to climate change. We have further established 12 solar-powered community gardens, as incentives for people to move out of riverine areas – promoting sustainable agricultural practices, improving

nutrition, and enhancing food security. Additionally, borehole drilling, maintenance, and management support has provided access to water for domestic and livelihood activities, while irrigation projects have generated significant income for the respective farmers. For example, farmers at Bonda irrigation scheme earned USD\$65,421 from bean production in 2017 alone.

Empowering communities through organizational development:

SAFIRE has also made significant strides in organizing communities into conservation and economic units, enabling them to drive the community restoration agenda. We supported the formation of Community based entities (Private Business Corporation Cooperatives, Commodity Associations), enabling communities to manage and sustainably harvest and protect natural resources such as forests.

Additionally, we established **22 community nurseries**, laying the groundwork for forest restoration and sustainable natural resource management.

The nurseries support restoration efforts at both individual and community level, while generating income for the nursery owners.

Sustainable livelihoods:

For the past decade, SAFIRE has successfully promoted sustainable livelihoods that align with environmental conservation efforts, benefiting approximately 33,000 households (about 165,000 individuals) across 15 districts in Zimbabwe. These initiatives include:

Mopane worm farming: In Gwanda, Beitbridge and Matobo districts we supported approximately 300 farmers in producing, sustainably harvesting and processing mopane worms, and by extension protecting mopane woodlots. Some of the farmers exhibit their produce annually at the national trade fair. We have seen the beneficiary households defending their respective mopane trees from being cut.

Agro-processing centers: Enhancing value addition and income generation through local processing of agricultural products. There are seven centers in Buhera, Mazowe and Bindura benefiting 105 people including 57 young women and young men (24-30 years of age) who own the centers. These centers are producing corn pops (maputi), peanut butter, mealie meal, and samp rice. Over 5,000 community members are getting either services (such as peanut butter making and milling) and/or processed products at these local centers.

Village Savings and Lending Associations (VSLAs): Empowering communities with financial tools to invest in sustainable livelihoods. Through the successful implementation of VSLAs, we've equipped local communities with the financial capacity to invest in sustainable practices, resulting in enhanced natural resource management and improved livelihoods. For example, Kushinga, a VSLA group of 15 women in Ward 17, Buhera, has annual savings of USD\$5032.

Irrigation schemes: Through the rehabilitation of irrigation schemes, SAFIRE has enabled communities in Zimbabwe's arid and semi-arid area to adopt more sustainable agricultural practices, reducing pressure on forests and promoting biodiversity conservation. With reliable irrigation, farmers increased crop yields and improved food security, reducing the need to expand agricultural land into forests. Rehabilitated irrigation schemes at Manjinji in Chiredzi, Shashe in Beitbridge, and Mutunha in Buhera have enabled communities to grow crops more efficiently while protecting surrounding forests, clean water sources, and wildlife habitats. Crops include watermelons, tomatoes, cabbages, leafy vegetables, maize, beans, and wheat, generating annual incomes of \$62,436 at Manjinji, \$3,718 at Shashe, and \$45,209 at Mutunha. This has not only improved livelihoods but also contributed to the conservation of biodiversity and ecosystem health.



Institutional modeling and policy Influence:

Under the community-based natural resource management program, CAMPFIRE, SAFIRE empowered rural district councils and local communities to take ownership of their natural resources, promoting sustainable use and conservation. Some rural district councils across Zimbabwe have mainstreamed a natural resources management unit – a model derived from SAFIRE two decades ago. These natural resources management units oversee the sustainable use of natural resources by both communities and the local authorities, ensuring a balanced approach to conservation and economic development at district level.

Sustainable agriculture and livestock management:

Sustainable livestock interventions reduced pressure on the veld allowing grass regeneration. Through its market linkages component, SAFIRE supported the Atikoreri community to undertake pen fattening, generating USD 131,659 in income. Keeping livestock in pens, the community allowed rangelands to recover, enhanced manure use for crop farming, and adopted more sustainable livestock practices — demonstrating a win-win for both people and the environment.



STRATEGIC CONTEXT

This section provides an overview of SAFIRE's current state, highlighting our strengths, challenges, opportunities, and threats. This situation analysis informs our strategic plan that leverages our strengths, addresses our challenges, seizes opportunities, and mitigates threats to reduce risks.

Strengths

Unlocking the potential of NTFPs:

SAFIRE is pioneering a game-changing approach to sustainable Community-Based Natural Resource Management (CBNRM) by harnessing the power of Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs). Our model integrates innovative production, processing, and pursuing digital market platforms to unlock the economic potential of NTFPs such as mopane worm, baobab, marula, manketti, berchemia, indigenous vegetables and honey. To maintain this strength, continuous investment in new technology and digitalization is crucial. We are partnering with universities and research institutes to drive processing and packaging prowess to ensure we stay ahead of the pack.

Incentive-based model:

SAFIRE is configuring incentive-based restoration interventions in a unique and disruptive way. We understand our local communities and what matters to them. We utilize these simple aspirations to drive land restoration programmes. Supporting rural livelihoods, such as access to productive land for nutrition gardens and reliable water – attracting communities away from riverine cultivation, to organized nutrition gardens with reliable climate smart solar pumped water systems. This has been a game changer, and communities have taken charge, managing the systems and driving the restoration work such as wetland reclamation and riverine tree planting. Communities have entered into quid pro quo agreements to be environmental stewards, while SAFIRE commits to mobilize resources to support environmentally friendly livelihoods.

Community-centred approach:

SAFIRE works directly with local communities, ensuring that conservation efforts align with local needs and traditional knowledge. We have, for example, worked closely with local communities to develop guidelines of harvesting medicinal plants in Zimbabwe. These guidelines aim to conserve plant species and ensure their availability for future generations by promoting ethical and sustainable collection practices.



Market linkages for community-produced natural products:

SAFIRE plays a crucial role in connecting rural communities to profitable markets for natural products, ensuring that conservation efforts translate into sustainable economic benefits. To advance access to markets we are experts in supporting local communities in value addition and product development. This includes processing and packaging, certification and standardization, and eco-friendly branding. We partner with private companies and facilitate our communities to participate in trade fairs and exhibitions, and engage in cooperative selling models. This has made us an attractive organization to marginal communities, enabling them to participate in the mainstream economy.

Local community capacity building:

We have a long history in building community capacity. We engage in training local leaders, local authorities and community level environment committees to strengthen governance for sustainable natural resources management at the grassroots level, and to develop their own conservation plans. This hands-on, practical and action oriented visioning process has given us an edge in advancing environmental governance where it matters most – at the resource-user level.

Reputation on delivery:

SAFIRE has a reputation for delivering impactful projects – and this can be leveraged to attract private sector partnerships and funding. Strategic positioning and targeted research will help identify key partners and opportunities, enabling SAFIRE to tap into existing reputation on delivery. We are a sought after organization for interventions on natural resources and community-based and community-led enterprise development at scale.

Collaborations:

SAFIRE has a clear history of effective and consistent collaborations with a wide range of stakeholders; communities, local authorities, government and other civil society organizations. We are good at collaboration and this has been our brand. These partnerships provide financial, technical and policy support to scale community conservation.

Promotion of sustainable livelihoods:

SAFIRE integrates conservation with sustainable economic activities such as beekeeping, agroforestry, and non-timber forest product commercialization. This reduces dependence on destructive practices such as deforestation.

Challenges

Fundraising:

Our fundraising efforts have been affected by lack of clear fundraising strategy and insufficient resources. Some of our long term funders have withdrawn from the region and the few remaining are likely to follow suit due to unfavourable economic fundamentals in the country. Our financial status is not sustainable and funding opportunities are restricted, threatening both staff retention and project implementation. Our insufficient financial resources further impede SAFIRE's potential, as limited funds hinder project expansion and staff development. Effective fundraising strategies are essential to address staff satisfaction and retention. We are prioritizing fundraising, targeting increasing unrestricted proportion to support our core activities and organizational development.

Financial management:

Our financial management systems are currently paper based, reducing efficiency and flow of documents. Use of online payment and procurement systems is critical to improve efficiency. We are looking forward to working diligently to address this. Additionally, our funding base is predominantly restricted making it difficult to finance overarching organizational needs.

Staff turnover:

High staff turnover, largely due to funding constraints, poses a significant threat to SAFIRE's progress. Brain drain and lack of continuity hinder our growth, as new staff require training and time to adjust. We intend to fundraise to develop our team and ensure we reverse the staff turnover trend.



Opportunities

Growing demand for sustainable products:

We have a unique chance to expand our impact and revenue streams by leveraging the increasing demand for natural, organic, and sustainably sourced products. Through partnering with communities to sustainably harvest and produce Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs), and linking them with private sector buyers, we can capitalize on this trend to grow our impact and organization. Obtaining organic certification for such products will enable us to access higher-value markets and command premium prices for our entrepreneurs. There is also an opportunity to work closely with ZimTrade, broadening the market base for our communities. Additionally, investing in digital platforms will enhance our online presence, connect us with more buyers, and increase sales for our community beneficiaries.



Private sector:

The private sector has the highest financial potential, and their interest in NTFP has been a game changer. As much as it has become a threat to SAFIRE, it is a sustainable enterprise approach that SAFIRE has always been hoping to achieve – getting to levels where communities and businesses can run nature-based enterprises without our support. However, a key opportunity now lies in identifying how to support the value chain within the current set up, ensuring equitable distribution of benefits, anchored on sustainable NR harvest. Private sector partnerships, for example, facilitated through events and targeted research, can provide critical funding and expertise for SAFIRE and improved benefits for local communities.

Clean energy cookstoves:

Historically, we have worked on clean energy projects, including creating clean cooking stoves from locally sourced materials. We are now considering partnering with industry experts to take our clean cooking initiative to the next level – manufacturing cookstoves with measurable impact on carbon reduction. Scaling up production and distribution will also make a greater difference in the lives of local communities and the environment.

Driving the localization agenda:

With increasing demand from international organizations for local implementing partners, SAFIRE has a unique opportunity to champion this shift, and build its capacity to secure direct funding. We can reduce our dependence on subcontracts and position ourselves as a trusted and capable partner, driving meaningful impact in the communities we serve. This strategic direction will enable SAFIRE to strengthen its institutional capacity, improve its financial sustainability, and solidify its role as a leader in the sector.

Climate change funding and the climate change bill:

The conservation landscape is evolving, and with it, new funding opportunities are emerging. As the world is faced with the challenges of climate change, a growing number of donors are turning their attention to conservation efforts that address this critical issue.

The recent tabling of the Climate Change Bill in parliament underscores the government's commitment to addressing the climate change crisis. This landmark legislation aims to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, promote sustainable development, and enhance climate resilience.

In this context, some donors are seeking partnerships with organizations that can deliver impactful projects, using conservation as a tool to combat climate change. This shift in funding priorities presents a significant opportunity. With our expertise and experience in community based conservation, we are well-positioned to tap into these new funding streams and scale up our impact.

Research:

We have an opportunity to establish a research component that documents our findings and experiences in community-based natural resource management through collaborations with universities. By establishing a research arm, we can improve our credibility, contribute to the body of knowledge in CBNRM, and inform evidence-based NRM practices.

Threats

Market competition and changes:

The growth in NTFP demand has brought increased competition and changing market dynamics. New entrances in the space are also on the rise. To thrive in this environment, SAFIRE will leverage its strengths and adopt a more entrepreneurial approach, focusing on innovative business models, market-driven solutions, and strategic partnerships. We will pursue a social enterprise approach, to expand our impact, diversify our revenue streams, and stay ahead of the curve. This shift will enable us to capitalize on emerging trends, build resilience, and achieve long-term sustainability.

Economic recessions:

Economic downturns and recessions in Zimbabwe pose a substantial threat to SAFIRE's financial stability and operational resilience. Reduced funding, decreased donor support, and constrained government budgets may limit SAFIRE's ability to deliver projects at scale and maintain key staff. Economic instability may also increase the vulnerability of SAFIRE's beneficiaries, exacerbating poverty, pushing communities to increasingly depend on natural resources, fueling environmental degradation. To counter this threat, SAFIRE will diversify its funding streams, build strategic partnerships, and develop cost-effective programs that can weather economic fluctuations.

Regulatory changes:

Changes in regulatory frameworks, policies, or laws governing environmental conservation, agriculture, and non-profit operations may significantly impact SAFIRE's work. Shifting compliance requirements, licensing regulations, or taxation policies can increase operational costs, limit program implementation flexibility, or even force SAFIRE to cease certain activities. To navigate this threat, SAFIRE will maintain strong relationships with regulatory bodies, monitor policy developments, and adapt its strategies to ensure alignment with evolving regulatory landscapes in the country.

Natural disasters and crises:

Natural disasters, climate-related crises, and environmental emergencies continue to become more frequent and pose an existential threat to SAFIRE's operations and beneficiaries in rural communities. Events such as droughts, floods, pandemics plus global geopolitics have been disastrous in the past, and can disrupt project implementation – destroying infrastructure, forcing us to divert resources to attend to emergencies. SAFIRE's work in sustainable ecosystems and agroecology can help mitigate these risks, but we will also develop contingency plans, enhance emergency preparedness, and strengthen our resilience to ensure continuity in the face of such crises.

Technological advances:

The rapid pace of technological change presents both opportunities and threats to SAFIRE. Limited access and adaptation to emerging technologies, such as digital platforms, and innovative solutions may render SAFIRE's services outdated and less effective. Meanwhile, competitors leveraging technology to improve efficiency, reach, and impact may surpass SAFIRE. To stay relevant, we will invest in digital transformation, develop tech-enabled solutions, and build partnerships with technology leaders, including local universities and global networks.

Persistently harsh fundraising climate:

The persistently challenging fundraising environment threatens SAFIRE's financial sustainability and program expansion. Decreasing donor funding, increased competition for limited grants, and limited corporate sponsorship opportunities may constrain our ability to deliver impactful projects. To overcome this threat, we will diversify our funding streams, cultivate strategic partnerships, and develop compelling, evidence-based funding proposals that demonstrate tangible outcomes and value.

Increased demand for natural resources:

The escalating demand for natural resources, driven by population growth, urbanization, and economic development, poses a significant threat to SAFIRE's mission. Increased pressure on land, water, and biodiversity may undermine our conservation efforts, exacerbate environmental degradation, and compromise the livelihoods of our beneficiaries. To address this, we will intensify our advocacy for sustainable resource management, support climate-resilient agriculture, and promote eco-friendly practices that balance human needs with environmental stewardship.



OUR VALUES

At SAFIRE, our values serve as the foundation for our mission to enhance community resilience through sustainable community based natural resources management. The values guide our actions, decisions, and interactions, ensuring we remain true to our purpose and vision. Our values embody SAFIRE's character and culture, shaping how we engage internally and externally, with our communities and stakeholders. And how we respond to challenges, and celebrate success. The following values inform every aspect of our work as we strive to create a thriving and resilient environment for all.



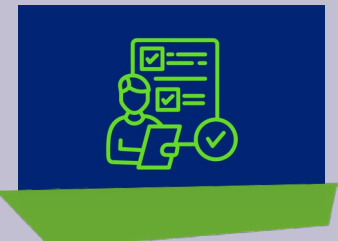
Sustainable rural livelihoods:

We support rural communities in managing natural resources for fair income, economic growth, and environmental restoration.



Innovation:

We embrace creativity and forward-thinking in developing solutions that respond to evolving community and environmental challenges.



Accountability:

We own our work, learn from mistakes, and strive for excellence. We're transparent, honest, and responsive to colleagues, stakeholders, and feedback, taking responsibility for our actions and outcomes.



We have our communities at heart:

We prioritize the well-being and aspirations of the communities we serve, recognizing that thriving people depend on thriving ecosystems.



Inclusivity:

We value diverse perspectives and ensure everyone has a voice, particularly vulnerable groups, to achieve equitable and effective outcomes.



Thrive in harmony with nature:

Sustainable use and management of natural resources for the benefit of current and future generations. We are guided by the principle that conserving natural resources provide continuous or infinite benefits. We believe that environmental responsibilities start with us.



Environmental stewardship:

We care for ecosystems, biodiversity, and natural resources. We invest to change behaviours and mindsets that prioritize environmental sustainability, driving positive impact through collective visioning and action.



Transparency and honesty:

We are committed to an open and honest approach in all our interactions. This commitment to openness empowers our team and drives us towards greater innovation and collective success. We are guided by the belief that full transparency is a prerequisite in community engagement. We share information clearly and promptly with our communities and all relevant stakeholders.



OUR VALUE PROPOSITION

For over 30 years, SAFIRE has been a trusted partner in strengthening marginalized rural and peri-urban communities in the arid and semi-arid of Zimbabwe to lead in ecosystem restoration, conservation, regenerative and nature-based enterprise development approaches. We integrate local knowledge with natural resource management and strengthen local governance structures, to create community-driven solutions that enhance livelihoods, promote environmental stewardship, and build resilience, through nature-based economies. We build skills and entrepreneurship that improve the lives of marginalized people and communities. We organize communities into economic units to fully participate in the mainstream economy. Our approach combines indigenous knowledge with innovative strategies, creating opportunities for learning, conservation, and sustainable livelihoods, ultimately equipping communities to thrive while protecting their environment.



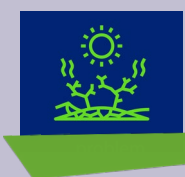
Our vision

Thriving and diverse ecosystems supporting productive lands and resilient communities.



Our mission

To strengthen local communities to restore, manage and sustainably benefit from thriving ecosystems



Problem statement

Environmental degradation in arid and semi arid areas in the arid and semi-arid of Zimbabwe, driven by poor local governance, unsustainable livelihood practices and climate change, poses a significant threat to the ecosystem and to local communities.

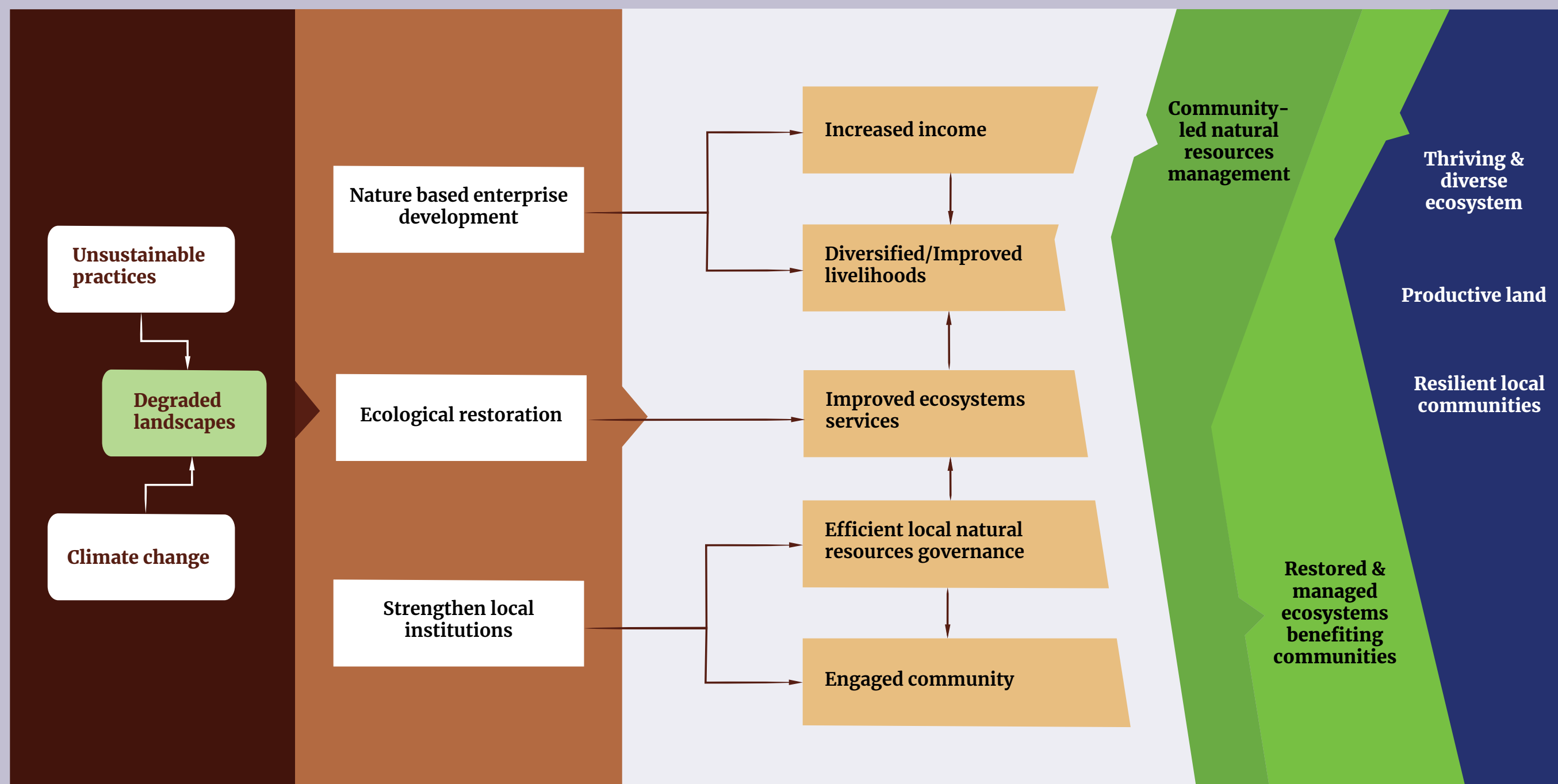
Most communities in these areas rely heavily on natural resources for their livelihoods, such as agriculture, livestock, and forest products. However, without proper management and governance, these practices lead to deforestation, soil degradation, and loss of biodiversity, making it even harder for communities to adapt to climate change and maintain their well-being. As a result, the ecosystem and local communities become increasingly vulnerable to droughts, floods, and other environmental shocks, and reduces the capacity of the environment to offer efficient ecosystem services, perpetuating a cycle of poverty plus land and environmental degradation.



THEORY OF CHANGE

At SAFIRE, we believe that engaged local communities and people are key to restoring, managing, and sustainably benefiting from ecosystems. We support nature-based enterprises and sustainable livelihoods that provide economic incentives for communities to adopt eco-friendly practices. As communities experience economic benefits, they begin to see ecosystems as valuable assets, adopting sustainable resource management practices that lead to responsible land use, conservation, and restoration efforts. Ultimately leading to a thriving ecosystem that supports productive lands and benefits the respective communities.

This approach creates a virtuous cycle of environmental restoration, economic opportunities, and community resilience. Improved practices contribute to healthier landscapes, increased biodiversity, and ecological resilience, providing essential services like clean water, fertile soils, and climate regulation. Engaged local communities and strong local institutions ensure that restoration efforts are community-led, sustainable, and equitable, supporting long-term economic stability and community well-being.



OUR GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

As we embark on this strategic journey, our focus remains committed to empower or strengthen marginalized rural and peri-urban communities in arid and semi-arid areas to take ownership of their natural resources and the environment. We recognize that the wellbeing of people and the environment are intricately linked, and that local communities are the best stewards of their own resources. Our strategic goals and objectives are designed to address the complex challenges facing these communities, from unequal access to benefits and lack of control over natural resources, to limited livelihood opportunities and degraded landscapes and waning biodiversity.

Through our interconnected goals, we aim to increase access to benefits, improve household resilience, enhance biodiversity, and promote sustainable natural resource management practices. We will achieve this by strengthening local institutions, developing local governance frameworks, and supporting community-led conservation projects. Our approach prioritizes community engagement, capacity building, and inclusive decision-making, ensuring that local communities are equipped to manage their natural resources effectively. And economically benefit from the arrangement to encourage their active participation and decision making.

Over the next five years, we will work to promote good governance, sustainable land management practices, and environmentally sensitive behaviours. We will establish partnerships with government agencies, non-governmental organizations, research institutes and private sector entities to leverage resources, expertise, and networks. Working together, we can create space where marginalized communities thrive, natural resources are protected, and the environment is preserved. Our strategic goals and objectives outlined below provide a roadmap for achieving our mission.



Goal 1: Sustainable livelihoods through nature-based enterprises development

The goal is to generate sustainable benefits, income, and livelihood opportunities from nature for local communities through developing nature-based enterprises that promote conservation and enhance community resilience to climate and environmental shocks and stresses. Our basket of NTFPs developed over the years, includes baobab, marula, marketi, masau, honey, and mopane worms. We will strengthen established enterprises and identify other potential communities to start and scale up new businesses.

Objective 1.1: Strengthen the entrepreneurial capacity of at least 1,000 community members (500 women, 200 youth) to develop and manage sustainable nature-based enterprises, resulting in a minimum average increase of USD100 in their household monthly income within two years.

This objective aims to help community members start and run their own businesses that use natural resources in a sustainable way. We will provide training and support to at least 1,000 community members, with a focus on women and youth. By the end of two years, these community members should be earning on average an extra \$100 per month from their businesses. This will help them improve their livelihoods and support their families.

Objective 1.2: Utilize the trained and mentored community members from Objective 1.1 to establish 20 community nature-based enterprises creating jobs and activating local economic growth while promoting sustainable conservation practices.

This objective aims to help community members who have received training and support start nature-based businesses that create jobs and stimulate local economic growth. These businesses will use natural resources in a sustainable way, which means they will help protect the environment while also generating income. We aim to facilitate the establishment of 20 new businesses that will contribute to the local economy and promote conservation practices, ultimately benefiting the community and the environment.

Objective 1.3: To promote sustainable business practices among nature-based enterprises, ensure that at least 16 of supported enterprises adopt environmentally friendly and socially responsible practices, resulting in the reduction in negative environmental impacts and an increase in benefits to local communities.

This objective is critical because it addresses the need to promote sustainable business practices among nature-based enterprises. Through adopting environmentally friendly and socially responsible practices, enterprises can reduce their negative environmental impacts and increase benefits to local communities. We will provide training and technical assistance to nature-based enterprises, focusing on sustainable business practices, environmental management, and social responsibility. We will also establish a certification program that recognizes enterprises that adopt sustainable and responsible business practices.

Objective 1.4: To facilitate access to finance and markets of 20 nature-based enterprises to generate an annual revenue of at least USD\$24,000 each from the sale of nature-based products by 2030.

We address the need to improve access to finance and markets for nature-based enterprises so that they fully participate in the mainstream economy. This would improve the economic viability and resilience of the respective enterprises. We will establish a financial services program that provides access to loans, grants, and other financial services. We will also establish a market development program that provides training, market research, and business linkages to nature-based enterprises.

Objective 1.5: Enhance community knowledge and adoption of sustainable livelihoods through NTFPs, and combining IKS and scientific knowledge.

Our target is to have approximately 6,000 households in each targeted District be knowledgeable of and adopt at least four sustainable eco-friendly livelihoods such as NTFPs, agroecology, agroforestry, and energy efficiency technologies. To achieve this objective, we will provide training and education programs for community members, focusing on sustainable livelihoods, NTFPs, and eco-friendly technologies. We will also establish a community-based extension program that provides technical assistance and support to households, enabling them to adopt sustainable livelihoods.



Goal 2: Ecological restoration

The goal is to reach up to 90,000 community members participating in restoration activities and restore at least 50,000 hectares of land in targeted marginal rural and peri-urban areas in the arid and semi-arid of Zimbabwe through habitat restoration and sustainable land management practices, enhancing the quality and availability of ecological services.

Objective 2.1: Enhance ecosystem health by restoring and protecting degraded landscapes through nature-based solutions: reforestation, erosion control, wetland conservation, and farmer-managed natural regeneration.

By 2030, restore 50,000 hectares of degraded lands in target rural and peri-urban communities through reforestation, erosion control, wetland protection and farmer managed natural regeneration. We will work with local communities, government agencies, and other stakeholders to identify areas for restoration and protection. We will provide technical assistance, training, and mobilize resources to support the implementation of nature-based solutions.

2.1.1: Protect at least 45 wetlands in targeted project areas by the end of 2030.

Wetlands provide critical ecosystem services, including water filtration, flood control, and habitat for biodiversity. Protecting wetlands will help maintain these ecosystem services, supporting both human well-being and environmental health. We will engage with local communities and government agencies to identify and map wetlands, assess their condition, and develop the respective conservation plans. We will also provide training and support to local communities to enable them to manage and protect wetlands sustainably.

2.1.2: Establish at least 1,000 hectares under farmer managed natural regeneration (FMNR).

FMNR is a cost-effective and sustainable approach to restoring degraded landscapes. We will establish FMNR sites, promote biodiversity, improve ecosystem services, and ultimately enhance the livelihoods of local communities. This will be achieved by providing training and support to farmers on FMNR practices, and working with local communities to identify suitable areas for FMNR. We will also provide resources and technical assistance to support the establishment and management of FMNR sites.

2.1.3: Strengthen and/or develop at least 15 land use plans at district level and at least 75 ward level land use management plans.

Effective land use planning is necessary to sustainably manage ecosystems. As we strengthen land use planning, we ensure that land use decisions are informed by ecological, social, and economic considerations, reducing the risk of land degradation and promoting sustainable development. We will work with local government agencies and communities to review and update existing land use plans, and develop new plans where needed. We will provide training and technical assistance to support the development of land use plans that balance ecological, social, and economic considerations.

2.1.4: Afforestation or reforestation of at least 30,000 hectares of land, and nurture at least 1,000,000 seedlings in community and household nurseries.

Afforestation and reforestation are critical to restore degraded landscapes and promote biodiversity. If we promote seedling production and re-establish forests, we can enhance ecosystem services, support local livelihoods, and contribute to climate change mitigation efforts. Working with local communities and government agencies, we will identify suitable areas for afforestation and reforestation. We will provide training and support to local communities to establish and manage nurseries, and plant seedlings in designated areas, and support subsequent management of the woodlots.



Objective 2.2: Promote sustainable land management by expanding the adoption of conservation agriculture, agroforestry, and regenerative agriculture to improve soil health, biodiversity, and climate adaptation.

This will be achieved through putting 10,000 hectares of arable land under conservation agriculture, 1,000 hectares under agro-forestry and 5,000 hectares under regenerative agriculture. We plan to implement a comprehensive approach that includes training, demonstration, and community engagement. We will work closely with local farmers, communities, and stakeholders to promote the adoption of sustainable land use/management practices.

2.2.1: Empower 25,000 farmers through sustainable farming methods – Conservation Agriculture, agroforestry, and regenerative agriculture techniques, incorporating local knowledge.

Empowering farmers with sustainable farming methods is important to promote sustainable land management. We will provide training and support to farmers, and increase the adoption of conservation agriculture, agroforestry, and regenerative agriculture practices, leading to improved soil health, biodiversity, and climate adaptation. We will use a combination of training, field demonstrations, one-on-one coaching and subsequent monitoring. We will work with local extension agents, community-based organizations, and farmer groups to deliver training programs that are tailored to the needs of local farmers.

2.2.2: Establish at least 150 community-based demonstration plots in each district to showcase successful CA, agroforestry, and regenerative agriculture practices.

Community-based demonstration plots provide a practical and effective way to showcase sustainable land management practices. With the plots we can:

- demonstrate the benefits of conservation agriculture, agroforestry, and regenerative agriculture practices,
- provide hands-on training and experience for farmers,
- build a sense of community and cooperation among farmers, and
- encourage the adoption of sustainable land management practices.

We will work closely with local communities, farmers, and stakeholders to identify suitable locations for demonstration plots. We will provide technical assistance, training, and mobilize resources to support the establishment and management of these plots.



3.2.1: Establish and/or strengthen 15 community-led governance structures that empower communities to manage their natural resources effectively, and ensure that these structures are functional, inclusive and accountable.

Promoting inclusive governance, with all stakeholders represented and having a voice in decision-making will be achieved by conducting community-led assessments to identify existing governance structures and gaps. We will then work with community members to establish and/or strengthen such structures – providing training and capacity-building support.

3.2.2: Improve the competence of 80 ward-level institutions/resource management committees on governance practices.

Strengthening the capacity of ward-level institutions/resource management committees enables them to manage natural resources more effectively, promoting sustainable development and improved livelihoods. This will be achieved by providing training and capacity-building support to ward-level institutions/resource management committees. We will conduct needs assessments to identify gaps in governance practices and develop tailored training programs. We will also provide ongoing coaching and mentoring support to assist institutions to put their new skills and knowledge into practice.

3.2.3: Develop and/or review 10 natural resources management manuals within 12 months.

Natural resources management manuals provide standardized procedures, ensuring that decisions are made in a consistent and transparent manner. The manuals serve as a critical resource for building the capacity of local institutions, community members, and other stakeholders to manage natural resources effectively. We will review existing natural resources management manuals and identify gaps and areas for improvement. We will then work with local stakeholders, including community members and government agencies, to upgrade the manuals, ensuring that they are comprehensive, simple, user-friendly, and in a language understood by the local target community.



OPERATIONAL OBJECTIVES

To effectively implement this strategy, we will focus on developing and strengthening key priority areas outlined below:

Build a strong team:

SAFIRE requires a robust and skilled team for this strategy to be activated. This entails staff development through training and upskilling to improve performance, as well as regular team-building to strengthen collaboration and cohesion. Improved staff welfare measures, such as motivation mechanisms including bonuses, conflict resolution processes, and competitive recruitment practices, will be pursued to ensure a talented and dedicated workforce is in place. If we invest in our human capital, we will cultivate a dynamic and productive team capable of driving our mission forward.

Develop funding strategy:

A well-crafted funding strategy is crucial for SAFIRE's sustainability. This involves establishing a comprehensive donor database, securing diverse funding streams, and developing strategic partnerships.

Review/update financial management and policies:

To ensure transparency and accountability, we will review and update our policy document, incorporating essential policies such as data protection and strengthening internal financial control. A new, dedicated communications strategy, backed by a separate budget, will promote effective stakeholder engagement.

Enhance monitoring, evaluation, knowledge-sharing and strategic networking:

We recognize the importance of collaborative learning and knowledge-sharing. To this end, we will establish a monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning (MEAL) system, complete with a database and strategic budget. This framework will facilitate continuous improvement, informed decision-making, and impactful partnerships. We will build and maintain strategic partnerships to leverage expertise, resources, and networks.

Strengthen governance and leadership:

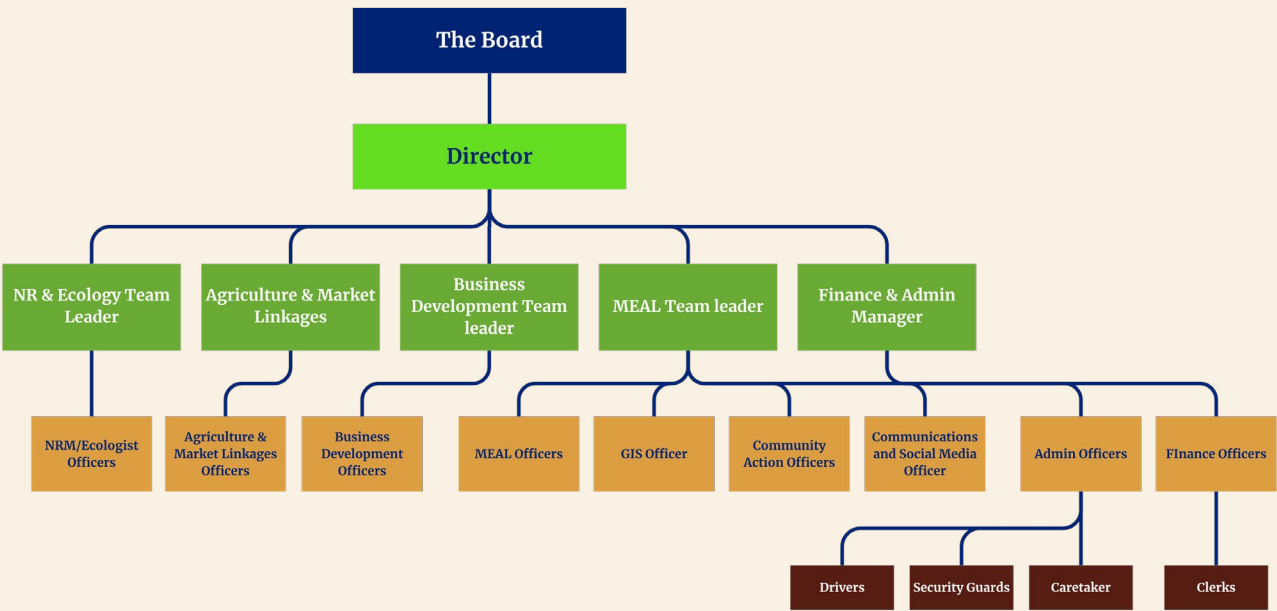
Effective governance and leadership are critical to SAFIRE's success. We will review and update our board manual, reconstituting the board to better align with our evolving needs. We will invest in strengthening our board to provide much needed visionary leadership, guidance and support with fundraising. Strategic board appointments will enhance networking, partnership-building, and fundraising capabilities. Additionally, leadership development programs will empower our managers to effectively motivate and manage staff, enhancing our culture of delivery and accountability.

Invest in and streamline operational efficiency and communication:

To support our strategic objectives, we require efficient operational systems. This includes investing in essential equipment, such as vehicles and spares, as well as developing a comprehensive communications strategy. A revamped website will enhance visibility and engagement, while a dedicated communications budget will ensure consistent stakeholder outreach. If we streamline our operations and infrastructure, we will create a conducive environment for our team to excel.

Human resources: staffing plan and organizational structure

Our growth and expansion requires a robust and efficient organizational structure. The following staffing plan outlines the key positions and personnel required to achieve our strategic objectives, ensuring that we have the necessary skills, expertise, and capacity to deliver high-quality programs and services. Designed to support our mission, vision, and strategic goals, this plan and organizational structure positions us to effectively manage our programs, build strong relationships with our partners and stakeholders, and maintain a high level of operational efficiency.



CALL TO ACTION

To implement SAFIRE’s ambitious five-year strategy aimed at restoring over 50,000 hectares of degraded land, scaling nature-based enterprises, and strengthening local institutions, we estimate a total investment need of at least USD \$5 million. This funding will enable us to reach over 90,000 people with sustainable livelihood solutions, build climate resilience in vulnerable communities, and protect vital ecosystems in Zimbabwe’s arid and semi-arid. We invite our partners, donors, and aligned stakeholders to join us in this transformative journey—your support will directly empower communities to lead in conservation, enterprise development, and environmental stewardship, delivering tangible and lasting impact for both people and the environment.



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