



ATHAZ

Agroecological Transitions for Horticulture in Arid Zones



OBJECTIVES

The project aims to enhance livelihoods and climate resilience of smallholder horticultural farmers in Botswana, Zambia, and Zimbabwe by driving the agroecological transition in arid and semi-arid zones. Specific objectives are to:

- Boost productivity, climate resilience, and water efficiency through farmer-driven innovations;
- Strengthen market-oriented horticulture and value chains to generate income and decent rural jobs;
- Advance policy frameworks and knowledge-sharing platforms to embed sustainable, smallholder-focused practices;
- Scale up farmer-led innovation to influence national investments and policies in horticulture.



LOGIC OF INTERVENTION

The project builds on the premise that systemic barriers—climate shocks, water scarcity, pests and diseases, low market access, and weak extension capacity—can be overcome through innovation, inclusive partnerships, and targeted investments.

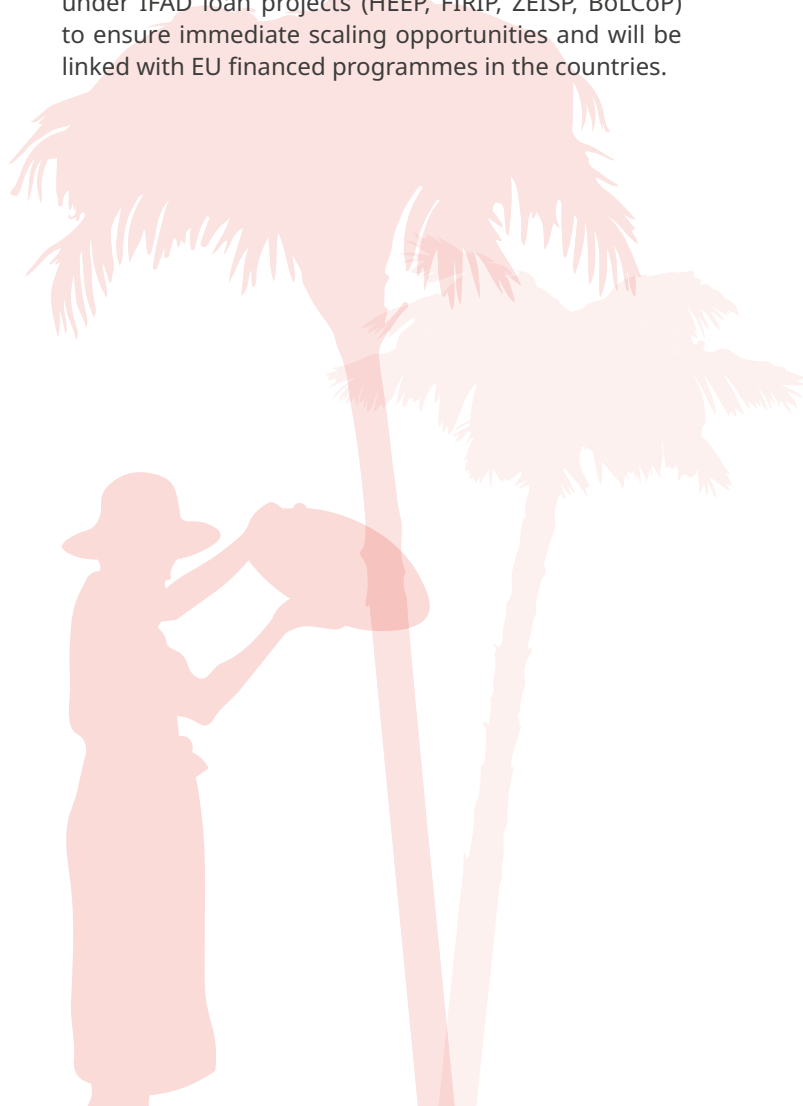
- If these farmers are embedded in competitive, market-pull value chains and supported by appropriate practices, inputs, services and enabling policies, they will secure stable incomes and drive local economies.
- If smallholder farmers are equipped with innovative irrigation systems, high quality seeds, improved varieties, pest control options, environment and market adapted cropping systems, and farmer-led research hubs, they can increase production efficiencies despite climatic variability.
- If knowledge is systematically captured and shared through technical, advisory and policy networks and dialogues, agroecological practices can be scaled beyond ATHAZ, influencing national and regional strategies to increase adoption and the number of beneficiaries.



STATE OF PLAY OF THE PROJECT

ATHAZ is designed as a multi-country programme under DeSIRA+ and has undergone extensive design and partner consultations. Next steps include:

- Stakeholder engagement with Biovision Africa Trust (BvAT), FiBL, icipe, EU Delegation, CCARDESA, and national governments;
- Validation and signing: Targeted for late 2025, with implementation starting March 2026;
- Preparatory activities: Mapping farmer organisations, setting up innovation hubs, and establishing governance structures;
- Implementation: Pilot interventions will be launched under IFAD loan projects (HEEP, FIRIP, ZEISP, BoLCoP) to ensure immediate scaling opportunities and will be linked with EU financed programmes in the countries.



MAIN INTERVENTIONS/COMPONENTS

Innovate (Farmer-led research and technologies): Establish innovation hubs to co-develop solutions in irrigation efficiency, quality seed systems, cropping system and nutrient management, promotion of integrated pest and pollinator options.

Connect (Market systems and value chains): Support development of 30 value chains, promote Participatory Guarantee Systems (PGS), and strengthen circular bio-economy models (e.g. Black Soldier Fly-based bio-solutions).

Scale (Policy and replication): Produce policy briefs, engage in evidence-based reforms, and align with IFAD loan projects to embed agroecological practices in national investment frameworks.

Coordinate (Knowledge and partnerships): Ensure project-wide coordination, monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL); facilitate cross-country knowledge exchange and enhance visibility of EU-IFAD cooperation.

BASIC INFORMATION

Contracting entity: IFAD (International Fund for Agricultural Development)

Implementing partners: IFAD (headquarters and country offices), icipe, FiBL and Biovision Africa Trust (BvAT). Other partners are CCARDESA, SADC, NARES, farmer organisations (FOs), MSMEs, national governments.

Countries: Botswana, Zambia, Zimbabwe.

Start: 2026.

Duration: 3 years.

Funding: The 14M€ project is funded by the European Union.