CARBCRED AFRICA

National River Rehabilitation and Biodiversity Restoration Programme

Programme Value	US$7.44 million over five years
Target Provinces	Mashonaland Central, Mashonaland West, Mashonaland East, and Matabeleland South
Core Delivery Model	River rehabilitation, community stewardship, and catchment restoration using Nature Based Solutions and Assisted Natural Regeneration
Primary Outcome	Restored river systems, stronger water security, improved biodiversity, and durable climate resilience

Executive Summary

CarbCred Africa proposes a five year national programme to rehabilitate degraded river systems and associated catchments in four strategic provinces of Zimbabwe. The programme is structured as a practical response to riverbank erosion, siltation, wetland loss, biodiversity decline, destructive land use practices, and weak community stewardship around priority river corridors.

The proposal combines Nature Based Solutions and Assisted Natural Regeneration with targeted river works, social mobilisation, and catchment restoration. This allows the programme to address both the visible symptoms of river degradation and the upstream drivers that continue to undermine water security, agricultural productivity, ecological integrity, and climate resilience.

The strategic logic is simple. If Zimbabwe restores priority river systems as natural infrastructure, the country protects water resources, reduces land degradation, improves ecosystem function, strengthens livelihoods, and creates a credible platform for climate, biodiversity, and ecosystem service finance. The programme therefore has environmental, economic, and national development significance.

The requested capital envelope is US$7.44 million across a delivery period from 2026 to 2031. The funding case is built around phased implementation, measurable outcomes, strong institutional collaboration, and a practical pathway toward long term sustainability through community stewardship and future results based finance.

Why This Programme Matters Nationally

Zimbabwe's river systems support agriculture, domestic and industrial water supply, biodiversity, and local livelihoods. When these systems are degraded, the resulting losses are felt across food production, settlement resilience, economic productivity, and environmental stability.

The pressures identified are severe and familiar: streambank cultivation, illegal sand mining, deforestation, poor watershed governance, wetland disturbance, and uncontrolled erosion. These pressures reduce water quality, increase sediment loads, weaken riverbank stability, diminish ecological health, and increase exposure to drought and flood impacts.

A national response is therefore warranted. The programme is not a narrow conservation activity. It is a natural infrastructure investment with direct relevance to water security, land restoration, community resilience, and long term public value.

Strategic Pillars

Pillar	Strategic Focus
1	Rehabilitation of degraded river systems and riparian zones
2	Community engagement, behaviour change, and removal of destructive river practices
3	Restoration of degraded catchment landscapes that feed priority rivers

Programme Objective and Technical Response

The overall objective is to restore the ecological integrity and climate resilience of major river systems through nature based restoration and community stewardship. In practice, this means stabilising riverbanks, restoring riparian buffers and wetlands, regenerating riverine vegetation, reducing sedimentation, improving water quality, and rebuilding local systems of care and compliance around the rivers.

The technical design is intentionally integrated. It does not rely on isolated works alone. River rehabilitation is combined with community awareness, local stewardship structures, alternative livelihoods, catchment restoration, and long term monitoring so that gains made on the ground are not reversed by continued degradation upstream or alongside the river corridor.

Target Geography and Priority River Systems

The programme focuses on strategic river systems in four provinces. These rivers underpin irrigation schemes, urban water supply, local production systems, and downstream ecological functions.

Province	Priority River Systems
Mashonaland Central	Mazowe, Ruya, Chesa, and Gwatera
Mashonaland West	Mupfure, Angwa, and Sanyati
Matabeleland South	Tuli and Shashe

Three Part Delivery Model

Component 1 River Rehabilitation

This is the core ecological investment. It includes riparian buffer restoration with indigenous species, bioengineering for riverbank stabilisation, wetland rehabilitation and protection, erosion control structures such as gabions and check dams, and Assisted Natural Regeneration of riverine forests.

The expected result is a visible reduction in erosion and sedimentation, stronger riverbank stability, improved water quality, healthier riparian habitats, and better flow regulation over time.

Component 2 Community Engagement and Behaviour Change

This component addresses the root drivers of degradation. It includes community awareness programmes, formation of River Stewardship Committees, community-based monitoring, and alternative livelihoods.

Alternative livelihoods include beekeeping, agroforestry, climate smart agriculture, and sustainable land use practices. Institutional collaboration is expected with the Environmental Management Agency, Rural District Councils, and traditional leadership structures.

Component 3 Catchment and Landscape Restoration

This component extends restoration beyond the river edge into the wider landscape. It includes Assisted Natural Regeneration across degraded catchments, indigenous tree establishment where needed, grassland restoration, gully reclamation, soil conservation, contour bunds, swales, vetiver stabilisation, tree nurseries, and small water harvesting structures.

The intent is to reduce the upstream pressures that continue to feed sediment, instability, and ecological decline into the priority river systems.

Preferred Programme Option

The strongest programme configuration is an integrated model that combines river rehabilitation, community stewardship, and catchment restoration. A narrower civil works only approach would deliver visibility but would leave key drivers unresolved. The integrated model is therefore the most durable and the most suitable for public investment and blended finance.

Option	Main Strength	Main Limitation
Riverbank works only	Fast visibility and simpler procurement	Upstream drivers remain and re degradation risk stays high
Integrated restoration and stewardship	Treats both drivers and symptoms and supports more durable outcomes	Requires coordination, mobilisation, and stronger programme management
Integrated model with future results-based finance	Adds sustainability and future performance incentives	Requires robust monitoring and disciplined market readiness

Implementation Strategy and Phasing

Implementation is structured in four phases so that baselines, stakeholder agreements, and early proof of concept work are established before large scale deployment. This sequencing improves technical confidence and protects capital deployment.

Phase	Period	Key Focus
Mobilisation and baselines	2026	Stakeholder consultations, agreements, ecological and social baselines, GIS mapping, and programme set up
Pilot restoration	2026	Priority riverbank rehabilitation, proof of concept interventions, and nursery establishment
Large scale roll out	2027 to 2030	Expansion of river rehabilitation, landscape restoration, and community stewardship systems
Monitoring, handover, and sustainability	2030 to 2031	Impact verification, adaptive management, ecosystem service valuation, and transition to long term custodianship

Illustrative Delivery Targets

The programme concept identifies early targets of 50 kilometres of priority riverbank rehabilitation during the pilot period, followed by scale up toward 500 kilometres of rehabilitated rivers and 50,000 hectares of restored landscapes during the main implementation years.

The overall five-year impact anticipates 600 kilometres of rehabilitated riverbanks, 70,000 hectares of restored landscapes, improved water quality, reduced sediment loads, more than 2,000 community jobs and livelihood opportunities, and stronger national climate resilience.

Governance and Delivery Architecture

A programme of this scale requires disciplined coordination between ecological delivery, local institutions, and public oversight bodies. The recommended governance structure is a Steering Committee for strategic direction, a Technical Delivery Team for implementation management, and province level and catchment level coordination platforms for execution and accountability.

Operational collaboration should include the Environmental Management Agency, Rural District Councils, traditional leadership structures, and community stewardship mechanisms. This arrangement keeps the programme locally grounded while still maintaining national oversight and investor confidence.

A concise stakeholder engagement plan, safeguards process, grievance route, and financial control framework should be established at inception. These are essential for credibility and for disciplined execution in a multi stakeholder environment.

Risk and Mitigation Summary

Risk Area	Potential Effect	Practical Mitigation
Weak stakeholder alignment	Delayed implementation or uneven local cooperation	Front loaded consultations, formal agreements, and shared accountability at provincial level
Continued destructive practices	Reversal of restoration gains	Behaviour change work, local stewardship committees, and coordinated enforcement support
Climate shocks	Damage to young restoration sites	Phased implementation, adaptive site design, and monitoring led response
Weak monitoring discipline	Reduced confidence in outcomes and finance potential	Structured monitoring, reporting, and verification from inception

Funding gaps	Interrupted delivery	Phased capital planning and early engagement with grant and blended finance partners

Investment Case and Financing Logic

The investment proposition rests on a clear combination of national value and future finance optionality. The programme creates public benefits through restored natural infrastructure, improved ecosystem function, stronger community resilience, and reduced long term land and water degradation costs.

At the same time, the programme creates a platform for future carbon finance, biodiversity linked value, and ecosystem service payments.

Early capital will fund baselines, programme mobilisation, ecological works, community systems, and monitoring. Once the programme has credible performance data and an operational governance architecture, additional blended and results based funding can be layered more confidently.

Budget Summary

Budget Category	Amount in US$
Project set up and baseline studies, including registration preparation and statutory fees	**900,000**
Equipment and technology procurement	**740,000**
Community programmes and livelihoods	**1,200,000**
River rehabilitation activities	**2,200,000**
Landscape and catchment restoration	**1,000,000**
Monitoring, reporting, and verification	**600,000**
Administration and project management	**800,000**
Total Programme Budget	**7,440,000**

Key Equipment Line Items

Item	Quantity	Cost in US$
4 by 4 field vehicles	5	250,000
River flow monitoring equipment	10	120,000
Drones for mapping and monitoring	3	30,000
Tree nursery infrastructure	6	100,000
Soil restoration equipment	15	80,000
Water quality testing kits	15	40,000

Expected Five Year Results

- 600 kilometres of rehabilitated riverbanks
- 70,000 hectares of restored landscapes
- Improved water quality and reduced sediment loads
- More than 2,000 community jobs and livelihood opportunities
- Stronger climate resilience and better stewardship of priority river systems