

# Making a difference in Africa

WHEN ELIZABETH BARA '87 watches rural-area Zimbabwe women dance with joy over their newfound financial stability, she knows she's created something meaningful.

Bara is co-founder and executive director of ASAP, A Self-Help Assistance Program and a nonprofit that cultivates self-reliance in the people of southern Africa. Women who once begged in the streets have learned how to generate their own income, thanks to ASAP.



Elizabeth Bara runs a nonprofit that helps people in Africa become self-reliant.

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"I've always wanted to work toward positive change. Seeing these women celebrate their wealth and achievements is a truly rewarding experience," says Bara.

ASAP's roots sprung from Bara's experience after graduation, when she joined the Peace Corps and taught at a high school in Swaziland. There, Bara met and married another corps volunteer. Determined to make a difference in Africa, the couple returned to the United States and co-founded

ASAP in 1992. Their first donation came from Judith Ramaley, former PSU president, and Bara says this was the positive reinforcement she needed to persevere.

"That donation proved to me that people really were interested in ASAP," explains Bara. "You need public support for a venture like this, and her contribution showed that someone else thought our program had merit."

The couple lived and worked in Zimbabwe from 1994 to 2005. During those 11 years, they gained the trust of local residents, established their program in three communities, and developed a skilled staff.

ASAP has helped establish rural savings clubs, education assistance, health and nutrition training workshops, and agricultural improvements. Although the savings club project was inspired by CARE International, Bara and her husband were never drawn to the idea of joining an existing organization.

"Our approach was different—we targeted pure community development. We believed we could have a bigger impact with direct support right where it's needed."

Bara and her husband now run ASAP from Peachtree City, Georgia, but they return to Zimbabwe at least once a year. Encouraged by the amazing changes she's witnessed in the lives of rural Africans, Bara is excited to take this model and replicate it elsewhere. ASAP currently has operating agreements pending in Zambia, Mozambique, and Malawi. ■ BY KJ FIELDS