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# CHASEYAMA AGROECOLOGY NEWSLETTER



**PORET**

Jinga Village, Chaseyama, Chimanimani District, 0773 025 438

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## TRENDS IN FOOD SYSTEMS IN ZIMBABWE: THE STORY OF CHAMUDONDO

The Zimbabwean food system has changed since the 20<sup>th</sup> century. People used to grow the traditional varieties of seeds but now most of them are using hybrid crops. The traditional crops are now unpopular in many communities. This unpopularity can be seen by a number of hybrid seeds being grown in the fields compared to the traditional seed varieties.

Blessing Chamudondo has a clear understanding of the trends in the food systems here in the Chimanimani District. During the 1970s, his parents used to plant different types of crops including traditional varieties of beans, wheat, sorghum, millet, maize and others for family consumption. The surplus would be used for sale to other people in the community.

Production of such crops started to decline after Zimbabwe's Independence when the traditional varieties were replaced with lab engineered crops. This was because the food production in the country was largely in the hands of white farmers who used artificial fertilisers, chemicals and hybrid seeds on their farmers. This meant that the traditional seed varieties were slowly removed from the system.

Through the 80s, the government issued seeds and fertilisers to farmers under the government input scheme.



*Different food types grown in Chaseyama*

This system of food production created two societies: those in the rural areas who primarily consumed the traditional foods, and those that consumed the crops grown using the artificial means, which were mainly consumed in the cities.

Small scale farmers were involved. The Chamudondo family started to use fertilisers for food production. This continued for some years.

Blessing then decided to go back to traditional seed varieties. Having seen the gradual eradication of traditional

Seeds from the food system in Chimanimani District, Blessing Chamudondo is working with farmers in Chaseyama, helping them to restore the traditional seeds in the system. He is working tirelessly to make sure that farmers are able to access the traditional seed varieties. This is done through exchange visits, holding seed fairs and promoting farmer-led demonstration plots in each village.

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## WATER HARVESTING IN RURAL AREAS: THE STORY OF KUMBIRAI DUBE

The story of permaculture cannot be complete without mentioning the subject of rainwater or water harvesting. It is a practise equally important in the Dryland areas. For residents of these areas to survive, they really need water.

The late Mr Phiri from Zvishavane was well known for his water harvesting magic through implementing various ways of water harvesting including the Phiri Pits, water reservoirs and promotion of ground cover though vegetation. In Chimanimani, we have a few people who have walked in the shoes of Mr Phiri in terms of water harvesting. One of these is Kumbirai Dube.

When Kumbirai left his job in Bindura in 1997, he went to live in Chaseyama, Chimanimani, where the climate is always hot and few rains are received yearly. Kumbirai thought it good to start harvesting water so that he could have enough moisture for his crop production project.

The first thing he did was to start constructing the swales to capture water and keep it from moving downwards. This would keep the moisture on his fields. In a period of just one season, he noticed that the moisture content in his field had changed and that crop wilting took longer to happen after the rains have gone. He was inspired to continue making swales.

He also managed to construct a dam along one of the gullies which was cutting across his field. The dam he constructed captured the water and forcing it to sink underground. This has increased the vegetation in areas downstream as there is now more water.

***Swales are designed to manage water runoff, filter pollutants, and increase rainwater infiltration.***

Kumbirai then went further by organising a group of farmers from Hapare Village with the support of Tsuru, to start making swales at their farms. The group was named Hapare FALG (Farmers Action Learning Group). Their first move was to make swales at each members homestead before moving on to help other people like Mr Manjoro's one of the farmers who was not a member of FALG but with quest for water harvesting. The swales were then made from one homestead to another though this FALG group initiative.

Today the swale technology of water harvesting is popular in the area. There are noticeable changes in food production as crop wilting has been reduced since there is more moisture content in the soil captured through the swales.



*Above: Swales and a mini Dam at Mr Manjoro Homestead in Wengezi*



*A swale constructed in Kumbirai Dube's Field in Hapare*

## RE-INVENTING THE OLD FARMING PRACTISES: STORY OF T. DZOKURASA

To understand the term agroecology, we go back to the year 2012 when TSURO and then PORET were doing projects in Chaseyama, says Tsvakai Dzokurasa. Traditionally she was practising agroecology as she was involved much into organic farming, crop rotation, ground cover and following other principles of agroecology.

According to Tsvakai, her parents never told them the kind of farming they were doing. They were just following the principles of farming they were being trained to do by their parents. For instance they were told to make heaps of manure and keep them for weeks and then turn it once in a while. They would then spread it in the field and till the land covering the manure with soil. This was done months before the planting season commences. She only knew that it was compost making which was essential to fertilise the soil when these organisations came to their home area training farmers about Permaculture.



*Above: Tsvakai Dzokurasa at her homestead in Hapare Village*



*Above: farmers doing land preparation at Tsvakai Dzokurasa's field.*

The first thing she remembered being taught by the organisations was to go back to the traditional way of farming. They were taught about the importance of small grains, the use of manure and the use of ground cover. So she started following these principles and discovered that it was true that the food production in such a hot area is best done following the traditional methods of farming. That same year, she started to make stone walls around her field to make buffer zones as well as clearing the land for good tillage.

After TSURO, she worked with PORET as a volunteer to train farmers about Permaculture. She has acquired a lot of certificates through Permaculture trainings which include home based care, wildlife management, beekeeping, disease and pest control and the production of bio fertilisers.

Today Tsvakai Dzokurasa is one of the successful agroecology practitioners in Chaseyama following the required principles of agroecology and, year in and year out, she is harvesting enough for her family and sharing her surplus with others.



*Some of the participants during a field day at Tsvakai Dzokurasa's Field*

## HONOURING LEGENDS BEHIND PORET FORMATION

*PORET as a community based initiative has some brains behind. In this edition, we want to recognise the roles which were played by these pioneers. Special thanks to Taurai Mutembedzi (Mrs Piti), Mr and Mrs Zimunya, Mr Nkomo, PORET Board, Blessing Chamudondo and Kumbirai Dube for their unwavering support towards the success of this initiative which is now helping thousands of people in Chimanimani and initiating change in different communities in Zimbabwe and the world at large.*

The brain behind the formation of PORET is Taurai Mutembedzi the wife to Julious Piti. She chose to stay in Chaseyama around 1995 after visiting their brethren in Christ Mr and Mrs Zimunya in Chaseyama. This is when she thought of staying in that area. The Zimunya family supported the Piti family projects giving them guideline on how best they can survive in the hot area.



*Above: Mrs Zimunya with Mercy and Rachel in her hands at Chaseyama*



*Above: Taurai Mutembedzi*

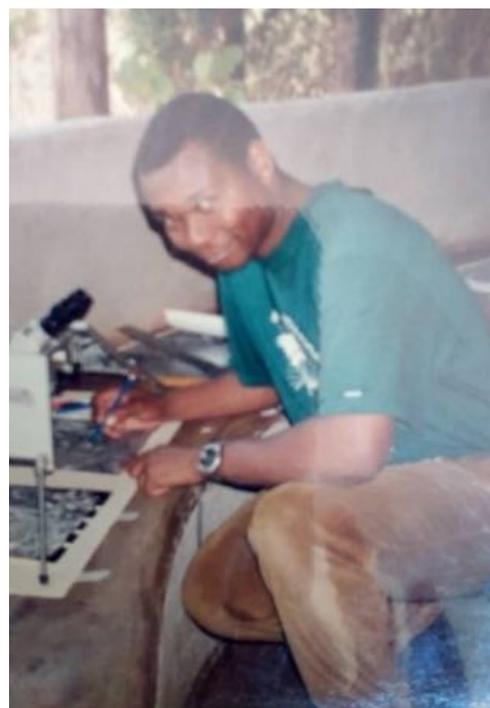


*Piti and Mulambo*

Mr Chamudondo, a well-known agroecology practitioner and a trainer, supported the vision of PORET. He used to come to train farmers in the area about permaculture. Today he is the Programs Manager at PORET.

Mr Nkomo supported the project from its inception up to now. He was with the project from day one, offering help in tree planting, water harvesting. There is also Noel and Onai Piti who planted fruit trees at PORET. Special thanks to the late Headman Jinga who played a crucial role supporting the project at every step.

Mr Alias Mlambo, Julious Piti, Mr Harahwa the former Chimanimani District CEO and Zephryn Ndukumana were the founding board members of PORET before its registration.



*Zephryn Ndukumana a Lecturer at Africa University.*

### **Message from PORET's Director, Julious Piti:**

"I would like to thank the people who helped PORET to be where it is today. I share this with you to appreciate the work you are doing as a big team. PORET was built by people who had vision to see the community of Chaseyama developing despite many challenges facing it. I also want to continue share about succession plan each time. Let's continue working as a team to develop our community."