

CHASEYAMA AGROECOLOGY NEWSLETTER



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TSOTSO STOVE: AN ANSWER TO DEFORESTATION

From 23-24 September, PORET collaborated with the Chaseyama Permaculture Club to hold a training workshop on making tsotso stoves. This style of stove offers one solution to the mass deforestation that has been happening across the three wards we work in. They require very little fuel for cooking.

Deforestation is caused primarily by human activities and is leading to natural disasters such as poor rainfall, desertification. It even contributes to the pandemics facing the planet through the reduction of environments for wildlife. A primary activity is the cutting of trees for firewood, a need that has been exacerbated by the difficult economic situation where gas and other fuels have become unaffordable and electricity is scarce.

According to PORET's Project Manager, Blessing Chamudondo, the tsotso stove is molded using dagga, and then baked at very high temperatures which enable it to be used for cooking. Once ready, it only uses twigs and small branches from trees as a source of energy. The stove is incredibly efficient. It cooks fast and uses twigs, despite the popular view that fully grown trees or charcoal are needed for cooking purposes.

The workshop was held at the PORET Learning Centre. 22 youths participated, each participant coming from one of the villages in the three 3 wards where were trained mainly on the importance



Above: Tsotso Stoves molded and ready to be baked after the training session

PORET and CPC operates. These youths of the tsotso stove as an alternate to charcoal or firewood and also on making a business from tsotso stoves. Grace Gumba, PORET's Learning Centre secretary and one of the key drivers of the project, says that the project not only raises awareness about the sustainable utilisation of natural resources but also focuses on helping youths to earn a living through making tsotso stove for sale. She has seen successful examples of people making a living through selling the stoves. She believes that it is worth youths in Chimanimani trying such a project.

As for the next steps after the

training, Grace says that the youths are going to make their own stoves back home. After that they will then train other members on how to make the stove. The project will go a long way to provide youth in ward 2, 3 and 5 with an opportunity to turn around the misfortunes of losing valuable trees in the community.

To find out more about this project, call Blessing Chamudondo on 077 492 8376.

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IMPLEMENTING HOLISTIC LAND AND LIVESTOCK MANAGEMENT IN CHIMANIMANI DISTRICT

On 25 September 2020, PORET convened a progress session on its Holistic Land and Livestock Management project. Stockholders from Wards 2, 3 and 5 attended, along with other stakeholders from livestock department, the Ministry of Health, police, Agritex, village heads and PORET staff. Our sister organisation TSURO also sent representatives to take part.

Held at the Hotspring resort in Chimanimani, participants discussed what they had learnt and achieved since some of them had taken part in a trip to Matetse, Victoria Falls, in August last year. Those who made the trip had witnessed the Holistic Land and Livestock Management project that is being implemented by Allan Savory. The intention of the trip had been for farmers to understand how others from a region similar to ours are transforming deserts through the use of livestock. The hope was also for stakeholders to appreciate the project so that when the farmers implement the project here in Chimanimani, it will get support from the community.

PORET's project manager Blessing Chamudondo explains: "Holistic Land and Livestock Management as an approach in the management of natural resources which views the land as a whole and uses the traditional/natural way of managing the ecosystem using animals."

Savory's project in Victoria Falls is one of the successful stories of turning a desert into land filled with vegetation through the use of animals. Many farmlands in the world are being abandoned and condemned as not suitable for farming as they start to show signs of desertification. This has left the people with no choice but to either abandon the area or to turn farmlands into housing projects. The aim of this form of livestock management is to ensure the lands continue to be productive.

During the progress meeting, participants drew up a list of what they learnt from Victoria Falls. They learnt that:

- ✓ Deserts can be turned back into farmlands
- ✓ Livestock can be used to heal the land through the impacting method
- ✓ There is a good relationship between livestock and wild animals if monitored and taken care of well
- ✓ Grazing plans are important in managing grazing lands and avoiding overgrazing
- ✓ There are natural ways of controlling pests and disease
- ✓ Cattle herding is a job which one can survive from
- ✓ Close monitoring of livestock is needed as witnessed in the herding formations used in Matetse
- ✓ Woman can also participate in livestock projects.



Above: Cattle herding in Matetse, a typical example of how we can use livestock to improve vegetation

Currently 5 farmers from Wards 2 and 5 are implementing the Holistic Land and Livestock Management program in collaboration with PORET and TSURO. Stakeholders from various governments departments are also working with the livestock farmers to make sure that the project is successfully implemented.

Unfortunately, the progress of the work has been slowed down by Covid-19 as people have not been able to meet and collectively implement the project. Now that restrictions have been eased, a timeline has been put in place. The immediate goal is for stockholders representatives to meet with other farmers to agree this timeline for the project. They have also identified areas to put in place the movable kraals which are a key part of the work.

It is vital for communities to understand that livestock is not a threat to our land. If managed well, livestock could be a panacea to the environmental degradation that we are facing. We hope that this project will go a long way towards turning bare lands back into forests.



Above: The team who visited Matetse posing for a photo



Above: A movable kraal secured with a white boma sheet

MY FIRST TIME AT PORET

As told to Kumbirai Dube by Dudzai Musapatika

My eyes could hardly see an end of the forest, they became dark as if it was at night. Bees were flying above me and the wind's howling seemed as though it was laughing at me for being foolish. Each step I took, the dead leaves crunched loudly under my feet, letting everyone and everything know I was there.

Sighing gently, I forced myself to sit down at the top of the big stone as if pull of gravity has totally overcome my life. Here I observed a well clothed environment which could hardly be eroded even if a number of cyclones came in a series.

A cool breeze came from the east, challenging me to pay attention to the environment. A line of green fruit trees with an even canopy, strong smelling herbs and a variety of vegetables were growing healthily, showing that there was a continuous supply of water to enable their growth. Frogs and birds were loudly communicating, singing,

dancing and praising their gods for improved and prolonged moisture content preserved through mulching and intercropping. And there was an ever smiling snake that was camouflaged in tall trees waiting for an evening prey. This was proof of a balanced ecosystem in a natural environment.

The stone I was sitting was in the corner of a well-designed vegetable bed which I knew after crushing onions. I saw fruit trees that were planted in the forest, swales, dams and beautiful huts. Ooo I wondered if I could build one!

PORET staff advised me to keep the wolf from the door and never keep ideas under one's hat. They explained how the Centre works and how the community benefits from it. One needs to subscribe as a Chaseyama Permaculture Club member, attend meetings and learn from a variety of sustainable



Above: Dudzai Musapatika

trainings given by PORET. I learnt that PORET is a community based organisation that plays a pivotal role in delivering high quality people-centred development to members of the community, covering Mhandarume Ward 2, Chakohwa Ward 3 and Rupise Ward 5. It is not a donor as I was thinking. The organisation builds capacity of members of the community on Permaculture Design, Nursery Skills Management, Food Processing, Soil and water management, Integrated Pest and disease management, Holistic Livestock Management and Seed Production.

With other members from Wards 2, 3 and 5, our capacity on Water harvesting was enhanced through workshops I attended at PORET covering the construction of an A-frame and pegging, making Bokashi compost that improves soil fertility and planting fruit trees with a guild around them. I was motivated and discovered that we are losing rich soil and water through run off. That is why we are always suffering from hunger every time and wait for handouts.

I was surprised to see thousands of seedlings in the PORET nursery, like leucana that is planted to fix nitrogen in the fields, and can be used to feed livestock, or added to composts to add soil fertility, form wind breaks and increase carbon sequestration. There were indigenous fruit trees which have multi-purposes - providing fruits, medicine, wind breaks, add organic material to soil and providing habitat for many small living organisms.

I wish to thank PORET for taking a wise idea of providing sustainable development to farmers in order to reduce hunger and poverty in the community. Farmers who started harvesting water three years ago already have stories to share on the importance of constructing swales and dams.

DISRUPTION OF ACTIVITIES BY THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The national lock down from the end of March 2020 has led to the slowing down of implementation of activities by PORET and Chaseyama Permaculture Club members in Wards 2, 3 and 5 of Chimanimani district.

The Covid-19 pandemic came at a critical time for PORET and Chaseyama Permaculture Club when members had prepared for Field Days, one of our major annual activities. The lock down imposed as a precautionary measure meant that we were only able to conduct 11 of the 17 Field Days that we had planned. Farmers who had put their resources together for those events that had to be cancelled were highly affected and demotivated.

The biggest impact that Covid-19 has had on our work has been on the meetings that we usually conduct. Large gatherings were made illegal. As anyone who interacts with PORET knows, community meetings play an important role in information sharing, giving feedback and planning for forthcoming events. PORET's outreach program has thus been highly affected along with the implementation of some activities on the ground. We have had to rely on online communication but we realise that this cannot be accessed by all people especially farmers.

We acknowledge that Covid-19 has affected everyone in the community – our income, food, employment and social life have been impacted. Marketing our produce was brought to a standstill which has led to a huge decrease in family income. This, in turn, has affected the availability of food. Those in the community who depend on handouts were also highly affected as the organisations which used to provide food also ceased during the lock down.

This pandemic has exposed the vulnerability of farmers and our own preparedness to face such shocks. It demonstrates just how important it is to save our own seeds if we are to have any level of food security.