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CHASEYAMA AGROECOLOGY NEWSLETTER



Jinga Village, Chaseyama, Chimanimani District

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2021 DISTRICT FOOD AND SEED FESTIVAL CELEBRATIONS

The 2021 Chimanimani District Food and Seed Festival was held at PORET Training Centre in Jinga Village Chaseyama. Held under the theme *Wild vegetables: alternative nutrition in times of crisis*, the festival took place from the 21 to the 22 of September.

Various organisations attended the celebrations. These included Towards Sustainable Utilisation of Resources Organisation (TSURO) and Chikukwa Ecological Land Use Community Trust (CELUCT) who were the hosting organisations along with PORET. Mount Hamden-based organisation Fambidzanai sent members from Goromonzi and Bulawayo to learn along with the hosting organisation. Fachig from Mt Darwin and ZimSOFF from Gutu was also represented.

Set to become an annual event, the idea is to first run the festival at District and then at National Level. This ensures that people from across various areas are able to come and learn about the importance of eating health foods and how to produce them. This year's theme brought in the different types of wild vegetables, how to prepare them and their health benefits.

Cooking demos were done by each participating organisation, showing different methods of preparing wild vegetables. Many types of vegetables were prepared including black jack which is well known for treating high blood pressure. Other vegetables such as *mutsungutsungu*, *mbowa*, wild okra were prepared.

Farmers also managed to display a variety of traditionally grown seeds which are grown in Chimanimani. In areas such as Chikukwa where rainfalls are high, they grow open pollinated grain varieties such as maize *mutsvuuragudo*, *chirimirimi*.



Above: Seeds displayed by farmers during the Good Food and Seed Festival showing dietary diversity.

DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE

Greetings! May I take this opportunity to thank you for the wonderful work you have done for the success of our first decentralized Chimanimani District Food and Seed festival. It has been a wonderful journey networking with you all.

Over this period we have introduced solar dryers into the CPC. This will take farmers a long way towards achieving food security. The increase in the participation of young people in agroecology activities is also giving us a guarantee of sustainable successional development. Our work is reaching far. Let's maintain the same spirit for the sky is the limit.

Julious Piti, Director.

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From the dry areas such as Chasesyama, farmers produce small grain varieties such as sorghum Marcia, *mukadzi usaende*. Those attending the event learnt how to grow these seeds and also got access to them to grow themselves.

The Good Food and Seed Festival presents an opportunity for farmers to learn best farming practises using organic methods. Taking a holistic approach, it also provides a platform for learning about different health foods and how to prepare them.



Above: members of the CPC receiving pots during the festival.

NEW SOLAR DRYERS TO ENHANCE LOCAL FOOD SECURITY

Food processing is an important activity which can be done by small scale farmers to add value to their farm produce. Rather than selling green vegetables or fresh fruits, farmers can dry them to last longer. This process gives the products higher value, fetching a better price at the market. A packet of dried mangos can earn five times the price of the fresh mangoes. This means farmers can return more profits.

To this end, PORET is supporting farmers to add value to their farm produce through processing them. Thanks to a recent grant from the French Embassy in Zimbabwe, PORET has secured three solar dryers, which will be used by members of the Chasesyama Permaculture Club (CPC) to process their products. The solar dryer dries vegetables and fruits.

Drying food is not a new concept, however it is the way that it is dried that is important. Traditional methods of drying vegetables such as boiling and salting are not economic. It is also important to

consider the nutrients of the final product. Using simple technology, which includes a solar powered fan, these dryers dry the food quickly so that the nutrients are locked in.

The hope is that by using these dryers, farmers will now be able to dry their produce to a commercial standard, which could increase household income. As part of the project instigated by PORET, a training workshop was also provided to participating 46 farmers in early December (36 women, 10 men).

Newton Spicer from Solar Dryers (Private) Limited Zimbabwe, the manufacturer of the dryers, facilitated the training. He demonstrated the set-up of the dryer, explaining the main components, how to use it and how to maintain it so that it continues to work well.

Participants learnt how to process tomatoes and mangoes during this training, to get a practical insight on how the machine works.

When used properly, this solar dryer reduces the risk of dried vegetable and fruit going bad by quickly reducing the moisture content

During the workshop, PORET's Outreach Officer Mr Dube urged farmers to embrace such a technology as it will go a long way towards help them process farm produce, increasing its life span thus increasing household food security.

Below: members of the CPC spread fruits & vegetables on the trays of the dryer.



TRADITIONAL LEADERS FROM CHIPINGE TOUR PROJECTS IN CHIMANIMANI LOWVELD

No one ever imagined that agroecology activities being done by small scale farmers in rural Chimanimani would inspire and catch the attention of community leaders from Chipinge.

Following a stakeholder meeting at Maunganidze Primary school on the 6 October, 23 community leaders were moved to visit and learn about various projects which are being implemented by the Chaseyama Permaculture Club. The main focus of the visit was a tour at PORET's Training Centre, to see what activities are take place as well as the outlook of the Centre and then to visit CPC members who are doing wonders in their communities.

The leaders first visited Hotsprings Secondary School Empowerment Garden where they learnt that gullies can be easily blocked by the use of dams and swales. Below the dams and swales, trees can be planted to make use of the moisture and enable them to grow well. The Hotsprings Garden is being run by young people with a vision to produce food and manage their environment.

The delegation also visited the Mazungunye family in Zvokuitirwa Village where they learnt about water harvesting. Mrs Mazungunye shared how her family constructed 7 swales (902 metres long) in 19 days and one dam, with the capacity to harvest a total of 283,400 litres of water when full. Most of the water sinks into the soil, raising the water table. 18,040 squares of land has thus been protected from soil erosion, maintaining soil fertility and improving plant growth.

The family plant sorghum, groundnuts, trees, pigeon peas and lablab between rows of sorghum. They have also developed a nursery and have so far propagated 5,800 tree seedlings. They sell their seedlings to the Forestry Commission, TSURO Trust and to individuals who visit them. Mrs Mazungunye encouraged the visitors to develop their own nurseries so they can both sell the trees and plant them around their homes.

On the delegation's tour around PORET Training Centre they witnessed the forest garden with its diversity of crops and trees. They admired the cool temperature they felt, which is different from the surrounding areas.

The delegation also appreciated what was being done by CPC members in the surrounding villages. They requested training so that they will be able to replicate these activities in their respective areas.



Above: Traditional Leaders looking at a mini-dam that has been constructed at Hotsprings Secondary



Above: During the tour of the projects, Traditional Leaders visits Mrs Mazungunye's homestead. Here the Leaders are looking at the Nursery Project.

CATCH THEM YOUNG: LET'S INVOLVE OUR CHILDREN IN AGROECOLOGY PRACTISES

One of the major aspects of life is sustainability and continuation. If we want to see agroecology practices flourishing and sustaining in this era which has seen the onslaught of genetically modified organism farming practises, it is best we involve our children in agroecology activities.

Currently the world is battling with climate change which is affecting us in many ways. There have been huge increases in natural disasters and disease outbreaks. To mitigate the effects of climate change, farmers should now focus on farming that works with Nature rather than against it. And in doing so it is important to involve our children so that this legacy will continue for generations.

In Chaseyama, some wise farmers have already started involving their children in practising agroecology through nursery production. Like other dry areas in Zimbabwe, Chaseyama is exposed to high temperatures, massive cutting down of trees and soil degradation. The best way to solve these problems is to plant more trees and this should be done from one generation another to instil continuation.



Above: children from Mwakupuka Village hold misau seedlings. If these youngsters are encouraged at an early stage and taught about natural resource management and the importance of planting trees, our planet will surely become a better place.

VILLAGE-BASED MAPPING WORKSHOPS HELP IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Village-based mapping involves the identification of the available physical features, projects and activities within villages. This mapping exercise helps villages to do proper planning before they execute any project.

With support from PORET, village-based mapping exercises have been carried out by farmers in different villages including Chayamiti and Mhizha. The main purpose of the mapping exercise was to identify agroecology activities being done by each village and use that information for development purposes such as identifying major projects done by each village.

The participants came up with village boundaries, major features such as water sources, access roads, farming activities, grazing areas and other income generating projects being done in the villages.

On the 26 October, farmers from Mhizha village convened for the village exercise. Participants focused on the agroecology activities being done in their village and presented their plan for 2022.

Farmers from Chayamiti met on the 27 October at the Rest Camp for the village mapping exercises. A total of 43 farmers participated (38 women, 5 men). They too mapped the distribution of the various agroecology activities in their villages and to discuss what they wanted to do in 2022.

Village mapping exercises are crucial to farmers for the purpose of planning and reviewing their activities. This will also give an insight to farmers on what can be done to best develop their villages.

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