

## **LEARNING FROM COMMUNITIES**

*A programme in sustainable land use skills*

### **The story**

For the past 20 years, the villagers of Chikukwa in Zimbabwe's Chimanimani Mountains have been using permaculture techniques as a survival strategy. Where once you would have seen serious degradation on the mountainside, due to poor soil management and inappropriate farming practices, now you will find abundant homesteads. Roads are lined with plants that help to prevent soil erosion, and trees, both fruit and indigenous varieties, have been planted with the aim to increase food security in the area. As a result of these and other sustainable land use skills, water is conserved and households are able to enjoy running water on their lands. This is permaculture in action and it is being practiced on a growing scale.

Newcastle University's Terry Leahy has been studying food security projects in Africa since 2003. He regards the Chikukwa project as "the most successful he has encountered" - [www.rainforestinfo.org.au/Chikukwa/article.pdf](http://www.rainforestinfo.org.au/Chikukwa/article.pdf)

It is this learning that CELUCT – the Chikukwa Ecological Land Use Community Trust – along with our partner organisations TSURO and PORET – are wanting to share with the wider African community. Therefore, in collaboration, our three organisations have been working on an accessible *Learning from Communities* programme, specifically aimed at small scale farming communities from around Africa.

### **How do we see this working?**

In order to make the experience most meaningful, we have embarked on a 3-phase program to help us reach the stage where we are ready to host communities from outside of Zimbabwe.

In the first phase, which ran in October last year, we successfully raised the funds to hold a Training of the Trainers workshop. This took place over four days with permaculture practitioner-trainers learning together in a variety of locations around the Chimanimani district, each offering a different climate to illustrate the breadth of their experience and to work it up into a programme that could be shared more widely.

We are now raising funds for the second phase. In this phase, we have identified a community within Zimbabwe which can send 20 of its members to Chikukwa and its surrounds for a two-week training programme. In this programme, those who were trained in the first phase will deliver the training to the 20 participants. In this way, participants see the work in action and more vitally, they can then take it back to implement in their area. As the environs of Chikukwa offer such a range of climatic zones, we are confident that the learning will have relevance for whatever community takes part.

The second phase will be very valuable in helping us prepare for the final phase, the delivery of eco-training to a community outside of Zimbabwe. If successful this should lead to an on-going programme in which up to three

communities a year are able to come to Chikukwa and learn from us.

CELUCT has identified a community that would greatly benefit from this training programme. The community is from Murehwa, 60 families farming some 80km from the city of Harare. Their management of the wetlands on which they are living is vital if they are to survive. The community itself has expressed an interest in developing their skills and thus, by sending 20 carefully selected members of their community, they are an ideal pilot. We will run an intensive two-week programme with plans to monitor implementation post training. It is to enable this that we are looking for funds.

Participants will stay at the CELUCT Centre, itself a wonderful example of a permaculture-designed garden. From here, they will take in the immediate village of Chikukwa as well as travel to other nearby areas. The areas selected provide a good cross section of how permaculture and other sustainable land use skills can be practiced in different geographic zones: tropical, dry land and savannah.

Teaching will be carried out by our experienced trainers alongside the trainers from the first phase of the project.

Learning will include permaculture and sustainable land use techniques: land design, holistic resource management, integrated livestock practices, relationship building. There will also be modules in conflict resolution, culture and tradition, as well as mindfulness, all of which have relevance within community life and emphasises our responsibility for the earth.

### ***How you can help***

We aim to run this training before the rainy season begins in earnest in November. We are looking for [\\$13,000](#) to run the two-week programme. The budget covers: accommodation, food, transport and training materials, as well as a small allowance for those who are not employed by CELUCT.

From our years of experience, we know what works in terms of content. Key aspects will include community livestock management grazing practices. *Learning from Communities* is a tailor-made programme for communities across Africa, therefore this phase of the programme will help us to explore and fine tune our delivery for future communities.

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Any funds raised beyond the \$13,000 needed will be kept for the next phase of the *Learning from Communities* programme to help create food security through permaculture.