

**KUSHINGA CO-OPERATIVE CONSERVATION PROGRAMME - MHONDORO
(BANGIRA GROUP)**

A Best Practice Case Study

Thematic Area: Development, Globalisation and Poverty Reduction

by

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The Earth Summit of 1992 opened up a whole new way of looking at development globally. With the Earth Summit came the realization that development could not be treated as a stand-alone issue, but had to be treated as a multi-faceted, multiple linkage process that had a bearing on present as well as future generations. In the process of development, the needs of present generations were to be met from the limited natural resources of the earth without compromising the quality of life of future generations who would also depend on the same resources. Of particular note in this quest for sustainable development was the role that communities had. No longer would communities be treated as mere targets of development but as concerned actors and partners.

Financing arrangements such as the Global Environment Facility have further empowered local communities to take development into their hands by placing financial resources within reach of these communities. Of particular note is the Small Grants Programme component of the GEF in that it lays responsibility of project identification, preparation and implementation with the communities. Projects thus developed have ownership by the communities and are better placed to be sustainable in the future. The projects also have a significant impact on other communities who then feel challenged to develop similar projects. In this way the concept of sustainable development spreads. Communities increasingly take charge of their destiny and begin to tackle other social ills such as poverty, HIV/AIDS, and gender issues.

The Kushinga Co-operative (Bangira Group) is one project that has benefited from the global focus on sustainable development. It emerged to take advantage of the increased financial resources, diversified and specialized institutional arrangements, and enabling policy frameworks. The Kushinga co-operative has through years of practical experience developed a work ethic and a framework of principles that can be considered as best practice for other community groups in the southern Africa region. Below is a brief abstract about the group.

1.1 Background and Description

The Kushinga co-operative was formed in 1993 as an initiative of the Mhondoro Ngezi community which comprises of approximately 1200 families. The area is traditionally an agricultural one, and this has put stress on the environment especially in the face of increasing population pressure. The environmental degradation that has occurred in the last few years is threatening food security in the area.

Kushinga co-operative was thus born out of need to curb the problem of land degradation and desertification brought about by indiscriminate cutting down of trees, uncontrolled grazing, over-cultivation, and cultivation in fragile ecosystems. It also sought to address a number of social issues such as HIV/AIDS. A grant

from the Global Environment Facility Small Grants Programme enabled the group to actively address some of the environmental and livelihood concerns in the area. An integrated programme addressing environment, food security, agricultural production, and housing was developed and implemented by the community.

The motivation for the group in tackling some of these problems came from the realization by the community that the relationship between man and the environment has been intact since time immemorial, hence the need to appreciate the economic and aesthetic value. In the African traditional context, there was always a tripartite relationship between man, spirit mediums and the environment. Much of these values still hold in most of today's society though the impact has diminished to an extent. The Bangira group hold a firm belief in this relationship between the spirit mediums, the environment and mankind. So strong is their conviction that they believe their project is blessed by their ancestors.

The 1992 drought, which was still being felt at time of project inception, motivated the community to improve on food security. Also motivational was that the project solved real problems articulated by the community and it was their initiative.

To achieve the above goals the Kushinga group set itself a number of objectives. These are listed below

1.2 Objectives

a) Socio-economic

- ❑ To ensure a reliable source of water for the promotion of ecologically sustainable agricultural production;
- ❑ To increase off-take levels of livestock in managed rangelands;
- ❑ To increase the capacity of the group to make decisions for themselves which impact positively on the protection of the environment and their livelihoods; and
- ❑ To increase productivity in both arable and grazing lands which would be translated into increased incomes per household thereby improving the standard of living.

b) Environmental

- ❑ To reduce the rate of deforestation and soil erosion which had resulted in the loss of biological diversity for both flora and fauna;
- ❑ To reduce the rate of cutting down trees through the construction of fuel saving stoves;

- To introduce a wider variety of indigenous species and reclaim gullies in order to protect the catchment; and
- To raise awareness on environmental protection and proper natural resource use and management.

Putting together the mechanisms to fulfill the above objectives required a great degree of organisational skills which the group members displayed. The nature of the project also called for high levels of community participation at all levels of the project cycle.

Below is a description of the strategy and process adopted by the group in undertaking to meet the various objectives of the project.

1.3 Strategy and Process

From the outset the community recognized that the programme they intended to embark on was complex and would require the inputs and intervention of a number of stakeholders, not least the participation of the community. The realization that all stakeholders were crucial in the success of the project led to the adoption by the Bangira group of a two pronged strategy to address their plight. Firstly, the group assessed the ability of the community to become involved productively in the project by establishing members who had at some point been involved in various projects. These members would then lend their project implementation skills to others in the group. The group was, right at the outset, gender sensitive and sought to provide equal opportunities for both male and female members. Community leaders were also involved right at project identification and conceptualization enabling the leaders to have a clear impression of project benefits. To engage the interest of members, projects with a short pay-back period such as vegetable production were initiated first. Every step taken in the project cycle had the backing of the community - nothing was imposed and external input was kept at a minimum.

Secondly, a strategy of incorporating key government and non-governmental actors in all aspects of the project cycle was adopted. This strategy saw several government agencies which include Agritex, Dept. of Natural Resources, Forestry Commission, the Rural District Council, Veterinary Department and non governmental organizations including Heifer Project International, Africa 2000/GEFSGP, Farmer Development Trust, Dairy Development Programme, Zimbabwe Farmers Unions and private organizations take up various assignments as agreed with the community. Most of the roles of the government and non-governmental agencies were in training and capacity building. External agencies were always aware that the Bangira group remained the primary stakeholder in the project.

The integrated strategy has resulted in the construction of a dam and the establishment of a number of income generating projects such as dairy, tobacco farming and gardening - among others.

1.4 Accomplishments

The construction of the Bangira Dam in 1995 provided a reliable source of water for the community. In turn a number of projects became possible as a result of the dam. Flourishing gardening, fish production and afforestation projects have been established around the Bangira dam. Paddocks have been established and livestock off-take levels from the community have improved significantly as a result of range management activities. Through on-the-ground training received from GEFSGP, the community embarked on different activities to protect the dam catchment to ensure sustainability of the dam and its environs. To date conservation activities undertaken include gully reclamation, afforestation and controlled grazing.

1.5 Process Management

A strong committee has been established by the group to manage the various elements of the integrated programme. The committee reflects a gender balance with four males and an equal number of females. Members of the committee are clear on the objectives of their group, their roles and responsibilities as committee members. Funds assigned to the group have been managed in a transparent manner and this is reflected in what the group has been able to achieve on the ground. There is, however, still a lot of room to improve the ability and capacity of the group to manage the growing initiative and the new challenges like HIV/Aids issues.

1.6 Project Impact

- **Community Empowerment**

Clearly the group has grasped the essentials of project implementation and through various support mechanisms that were put in place, the group has emerged empowered. This is reflected in the ability of the group to articulate its agenda even at international forums. A case in point is when UNDP was launching the Poverty Eradication programme in New York in 1996 when the representative from Zimbabwe and indeed for the whole of Africa was selected from this group. In the same year the project won the first prize in the provincial competition run by DNR.

- **Livelihoods Improvement**

The availability of a reliable source of water through the construction of the dam opened opportunities for the group to improve their livelihoods. They were able to harness the water and utilize it for different purposes which include horticultural activities, tobacco farming and livestock watering. As a result their livelihoods have improved significantly as evidenced by the variety of food resources and the higher levels of income. They have gone beyond producing for household subsistence to being involved even in the export market especially in the area of tobacco farming. A housing project has been launched and has a membership of 14 people.

- **Gender Equality**

Both men and women are actively involved though the later have emerged more empowered and have actively participated in decision-making and project management. The local project coordinator is a woman who has played a pivotal role in mobilizing people and coordinating the activities.

- **Environmental Impact**

Vegetation cover has improved significantly and species diversity i.e. both flora and fauna is once more evident. Woodlots have been established and each member has an average of 500 trees (both indigenous and exotic). Water table has risen due to ground water recharge.

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1.7 Lessons learnt/ Key success factors

A project as successful as the Kushinga co-operative is bound to have significant lessons that can be learnt from not only the outputs and achievements of the projects, but also from the processes that have been followed by the community in reaching these achievements. The detailed study will examine closely the processes, group dynamics, and creative institutional arrangements that have emerged from the implementation of this project with a view to providing useful pointers to other communities in the southern Africa region.

2.0 NATIONAL ACTIONS ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Since the production of the National Conservation strategy in 1987, Zimbabwe has taken cognisance of the importance of the environment as it relates to development. As a developing country Zimbabwe has often prioritized the need to achieve meaningful development for its people. But meaningful development can only come with the realization of the important linkages between

development and the environment. Zimbabwe's participation in the Earth Summit further brought home the development-environment linkage. Since the Earth Summit Zimbabwe has, at both national and regional level, sought to make sustainable development the centre of its development thrust. Much progress has been made towards sustainable development. Some of the critical achievements are presented below:

- i. Efforts to implement some conventions at grassroots level e.g. the Convention to Combat Desertification (CCD) by way of tree planting and rehabilitation of degraded lands,
- ii. Introduction of energy saving technologies as a way of reducing biomass consumption e.g. wind, solar, biogas plants, and tsetse stoves,
- iii. Enhancing livelihoods through provision of water e.g. building of dams, boreholes, etc.,
- iv. Capacity building initiatives through e.g. CAMPFIRE, District Environmental Action Plan (DEAP) and National Environmental Action Plan (NEAP) processes, etc.,
- v. Adoption of sustainable agriculture techniques in arid regions e.g. adoption of indigenous farming practices,
- vi. Adoption of innovative public consultation processes e.g. setting up steering committees rather than a one-off consultation,
- vii. Participatory Rural Appraisal for issue definition and prioritisation at community level,
- viii. State of the environment reports,
- ix. Focused research to inform policy and practice,
- x. The preparation and presentation of the draft Environmental Bill. This process has, however, taken longer than anticipated because of some "brown issues" that had to be factored into the Bill. It is not clear at this stage when the Bill will be presented before Parliament for passing into law. The aim of the Bill is to consolidate the more than 20 pieces of environmental legislation currently in operation nationally, which have made environmental management that more difficult,
- xi. An Environment Management Council has been proposed,
- xii. An Environment Management Authority, which will be the implementing agency, has also been proposed,
- xiii. An Environment Management Policy work plan has been put in place. An awareness and publicity campaign among parliamentarians has been undertaken, and
- xiv. A Tourism Master Plan is being developed.

Bangira Group has emerged as one of the downstream efforts to address national and global conventions. Of particular note is the Convention on Biological Diversity which has been tackled at local level through catchment protection, natural resource conservation and sustainable use.

2.1 Linkage of National Actions with Regional and International Agreements

Many of the environmental programmes and plans highlighted above stem from the various regional and international environmental agreements that Zimbabwe has acceded to in the last 10 years. Multilateral environmental agreements that have had the greatest impact on Zimbabwe - in no particular order of importance- include the following:

- The Convention to Combat Drought and Desertification,
- The Convention on Climate Change,
- The Biodiversity Convention,
- The Montreal Protocol,
- The Bamako Convention,
- The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), and
- The Convention on the Protection of Cultural and Natural Heritage.

Several programmes in Zimbabwe have benefited from the Global Environment Facility Small Grants Programme which was set up in 1993 as the funding mechanism for the main conventions that came out of the Earth Summit. GEFSGP has funded programmes which address any one of the three focal areas namely protection of biological diversity, climate change mitigation and protection of international waters. This funding mechanism has been able to demonstrate how local communities can confront issues of global concern in their local way. Other important projects have included the following:

- i. Cleaner production centres and mechanisms have been set up in partnership with the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA);
- ii. The decentralisation of Government institutions;
- iii. The National Action Plan (NAP) process has been put into place before NAP a GAP analysis process was initiated;
- iv. The District Environmental Action Plan (DEAP), Communal Areas Management Programme for Indigenous Resources (CAMPFIRE), resettlement, the Save catchment conservation and the South Eastern Dry Areas Programme (SEDAP), among others, have tried to uplift livelihoods in a sustainable manner.

A number of policies are also being implemented across ministries. These are, among others:

- i. The Agricultural Policy,
- ii. Decentralisation Policy,
- iii. Housing Policy,
- iv. Population Policy,
- v. Poverty Alleviation Policy,

- vi. Water Act,
- vii. Energy Policy, and
- viii. The Millenium Economic Recovery Programme.

At the regional level Zimbabwe is a signatory to the following Southern Africa Development Community agreements.

- Zambezi River Action Plan,
- Protocol on Shared Watercourse Systems,
- Protocol on Energy,
- Protocol on Trade, and
- Protocol on Transport, Communications and Meteorology.

3.0 CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES:

- a. **Organisational and management system:** While much activity has taken place at the macro level, a significant number of the national actions still lack tangible anchors on the ground. There is need for strong linkages between the national actions and local level initiatives that affect people's lives on a daily basis. Much of the work in this regard can be placed with government. It is government that needs to create an enabling environment that will see the necessary links being forged. NGOs and other civil society actors need to be awake to the opportunities that government and the general environment provide so as to fully exploit these opportunities. Africa 2000/GEFSGP has been able to demonstrate and create linkages between upstream (macro level) and downstream (local level), through the provision of information, technical and financial support to CBOs. It has played a pivotal role in influencing policy through the ELF Environment group. Such a strategic role needs to be pursued further and also to be replicated by other development agencies.
- b. **Resources:** The 10 years after Rio have been a gestation period for government and civil society. A lot has been learnt by both parties, but a lot more could still be assimilated. The challenges now are even more pressing than 10 years ago. A redoubling of efforts is required if gains made in the last ten years are to be preserved and consolidated. Resources are particularly important at this juncture and strong lobbying has to be undertaken to secure the requisite funds. A separation of development from politics would assist in ensuring that funds earmarked for sustainable development are not interrupted by political considerations. For Bangira the fund from GEFSGP was not sufficient to cover all the elements and the group had to mobilise support from other partners. They got assistance from Heifer Project International, Dairy Development Programme and Farmer Development Trust.

To date the group has been able to become self-sufficient that they are raising funds for the ecotourism centre themselves

- c. **Institutional Capacity:** Clearly one of the major challenges that still persists 10 years after Rio is the issue of capacity - both at the institutional and individual level. Institutionally, it is recognised that environmental management involves multiple institutions with different capacities to respond to any problems at hand. These institutions may be both at the national and local level. At the national level institutions have suffered from insufficient capacity and inadequate budgetary allocations from the Treasury. This has weakened the institutions ability to intervene effectively in sustainable development. At the local level, institutions- particularly the traditional ones- have had their authority and capability undermined by political structures instituted after independence.
- d. **Legislative support:** There is no shortage of legislation to support environmental management in the country. The major shortcoming is that there are too many pieces of legislation, most of which merely police various aspects of the environment without offering supportive frameworks. There are at least 20 pieces of legislation administered by 18 different ministries. Some of the ministries have competing interests, thereby contributing to overlaps and inefficiencies. The much awaited Environment Management Act is designed to harmonise all the different pieces of legislation into one instrument. A lot of hopes hangs on this new Act because of the consultative nature that went into its drafting. Of concern is the fact that the new law has been stuck as a bill for more than three years.
- e. **Political Support:** The political constituency in Zimbabwe has, by and large, been very aware of the various environmental challenges facing the country and has ensured that the country has been in the forefront in advocating for sustainable development. The adoption of the National Conservation Strategy in 1987 proved the political will to support the environment and sustainable development. In the 1990s government participated vigorously in many international conventions and signed many of these. While government has been active on the international scene it has neglected the formation of important local level support structures. NGOs have been sidelined in many of policy formulation processes, thus weakening the implementation of the resultant policies.

Globalisation poses a major challenge to sustainable development in Zimbabwe. Globalisation requires a new culture of political support for sustainable development. It requires a new breed of leaders who have the vision and courage to tackle the emerging relations between governments. Zimbabwe should be prepared as globalisation and the Rio process unfold.

External Support: External support for sustainable development has been significant in the past through agencies such as GEF and various bilateral and multilateral donors. A number of initiatives have been funded at the local level. The private sector has been active in supporting a number of initiatives and in providing technical assistance for others. Industry has even organised itself into various committees to address specific areas of concern in environment. Projects such as the Bangira Group have received significant amounts of external support from organisations such as UNDP under the Small Grants Programme and from Heifer Project International. In the private sector support has been received from the Scientific and Industrial Research and Development Centre, as well as the Commercial Farmers Union and the Zimbabwe Farmers Union.

4.0 RESPONSE TO IMPLEMENTATION FAILURES

- i. **Information:** A significant percentage of implementation failures can be attributed to the lack of adequate and quality information that supports development efforts on the ground. Information generated at national and international level often remains at the national level as there are very limited mechanisms by which that information can filter to rural communities. To address the shortage of information, efforts will be made to develop community specific newsletters that are written in the vernacular.
- ii. **Policy gaps:** It is recognised there is a gap between policy formulation, implementation and practice. Local communities and NGOs working with these communities have not been involved in the formulation of policy. The expectation has been for them to put policies decided elsewhere into practice. Future initiatives will only succeed if people are catered for right from the outset in terms of policy formulation and project implementation on the ground.
- iii. **Redefining partnerships:** Local communities require a redefinition of partnerships if they are to be effective participants in the development process. To date the relationship between donors and communities has been unevenly balanced in favour of the donors/NGOs. The latter are often seen as benefactors who have a right to define agenda for the communities. Communities are then expected to follow the whims of the donors. Genuine partnerships are required that are mutually supportive and beneficial to sustainable development.
- iv. **Capacity Building:** There is a lot of work that is needed in the area of capacity building. Many of the current efforts are fragmented and few and far between. A sustained programme of capacity building with sufficient resources is required. Capacity must be such that it enables rural communities to be integrated into the formal economy and to begin to demand certain resources for their development.

5.0 ENSURING SUSTAINABILITY

The Bangira group has demonstrated their ability to sustain the project. A number of factors can be highlighted that have ensured sustainability in the project.

- i. **Community participation:** The project has demonstrated that the concept of community participation when properly carried out does ensure the sustainability of projects. Through participation at every stage of the project, the community was able to develop strong ties, as well as a common understanding of what the project sought to achieve.
- ii. **Demonstrable results:** Since its formation the project has been able to demonstrate to its members consistent and tangible results. Members have been able to take home some money which has encouraged them to invest more in the project.
- iii. **Diversified partnerships:** Bangira group has been able to mobilise a diverse range of partners to assist with its project. This diversification has brought depth and range to the project.
- iv. **Resources:** The project has been able to secure substantial amounts of money from a variety of organisations. Most significant was the input from the Small Grants Programme. Apart from financial resources, the project has been able to attract technical resources from organisations such as the Commercial Farmers Union and the Zimbabwe Farmers Union.

6.0 CONCLUSION

To achieve sustainable development requires a multi faceted, multi disciplinary approach. A primary consideration in addressing sustainable development is the fact that the environment is the single most important resource the country has. Taking care of this resource while it fulfils our economic, social and cultural needs is the challenge that we have to face. Projects such as Bangira show us how primary the environment is in our lives. Because the environment is so important, our approach to managing it also needs to reflect this importance. The adoption of the National Conservation Strategy in Zimbabwe established the primacy of the environment even at national level. Subsequent efforts have sought to strengthen this understanding. The Bangira project has shown us that once there is acknowledgement of the primacy of the environment then other aspects of supporting this primacy can be explored. Prime of these supporting mechanisms is an enabling policy and institutional environment. Zimbabwe has built some of these mechanisms but a lot more can still be done. With the right kind of policy environment resources are then required to take advantage of the policy environment. Zimbabwe has received a significant amount of resources which have been utilised in a number of projects. A continued and increased flow of resources is required to maintain the gains that have been achieved in the last few years of sustainable development. The Bangira experience has also demonstrated that such initiatives require support from civil society and the private sector.

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