

GURUPIRA COMMUNITY: KATONHO GULLY RECLAMATION PROJECT

**A collaborative approach towards the Gurupira Community: Katonho Gully
Reclamation Project, with a focus on improved livelihood.**

Thematic Area: Development, Globalisation and Poverty Reduction

by

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1.0 Abstract

The Gurupira Community Project is a striking example of how community problems and challenges have been turned around to contribute towards improved and sustainable livelihoods within the community; better management and conservation of biodiversity; as well as empowerment, capacity improvement and partnership among and between key stakeholders. The Gurupira Community, with help and facilitation from Environment Africa (EAfrica), have successfully mobilized locally available resources and stakeholders to work together to reclaim an eight-acre gully, which had threatened their water source, and to use the reclaimed gully to grow food and income generating produce. This case study looks at the importance of partnerships in development and at how a Community-NGO-Public-Private sector partnership has worked together to create a model for improving community resource management and at the same time addressing issues of poverty reduction and project sustainability. The case study will focus on the development and learning processes of the project and how these can be applied to similar projects, noting the importance of the policy level backup required at various levels.

2.0 PERSPECTIVES ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

2.1 Global

The World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) defines socially sustainable development as that which is able to meet the requirements of today without jeopardising those of tomorrow. New natural resource management approaches are being advocated for and are intended to focus on strengthening the human rights of local communities, enhance their control over their local resource base and support their participation in higher level decision-making processes. These innovative approaches are being applied to community –based natural resource management (CBNRM) programmes.

To be successful CBNRM programmes have to be complemented by appropriate national policies and administrative decentralisation and devolution of authority over natural resource management. At the CBNRM Sustainability Criteria Development Workshop held in Harare, it was noted *that CBNRM approaches form a continuum from 'imposed', being those that are donor ,NGO or government driven, through 'assisted' to 'organic' forms which are characterised by communities having ownership with respect to ideas , implementation and benefits generation.*

For CBNRM to be successful the community has to derive economic benefit from the natural resources to sustain their livelihood.

2.2 National

The recurring drought in Zimbabwe has called for strategies to support communities improve their livelihoods, especially in drought prone areas. These were identified through the poverty assessment study done in 1995. Some of the intervention includes the Poverty Alleviation Action Plan and the District Environmental Action Plan (DEAP). These projects have had limited success mainly because of the macro-economic climate and the political situation in the country. These were donor funded projects and were all initiated by government and donors.

The government recognises that for these projects to be successful community empowerment through CBNRM projects is vital. There is institutional and political support from the government of Zimbabwe. The stage is set for successful CBNRM projects and a few successes have been achieved. This case study is one such success.

2.3 Local

Guruve is the Administrative capital of Mashonaland Central province. It is 200km west of Harare. The Guruve Rural District Council (RDC) has the Institutional responsibility to provide infrastructure to the district as provided in the Rural District Councils Act. Most of Guruve District is in the Zambezi valley and lags behind in terms of Development. A number of actors are involved in development activities, such as CAMPFIRE, Lower Guruve Development Association, EAfrica, and others.

2.4 The Project

The project area is 12km east of Mahuwe growth point. It is under Chief Matsiwo, in Gurupira Village, Ward 6.

The project name is Gurupira Community: Katonho Gully Reclamation Project. There are 385 families with a population of about 2000 people. The population is on the increase as a result of displaced farm workers who are migrating to the village. Every families has an average plot size of 12 acres, 7cattle and 10 goats. The nearest school is 12km away. The source of income is cotton, and the community is described as poor. The area receives erratic rains and has prolonged dry periods.

The group included Gurupira Community, the Guruve Rural District Council, Lower Guruve Development Association, Forestry Commission, National Parks and Wild Life, Agritex with coordination and facilitation by Environment Africa.

3.0 INITIATIVE DESCRIPTION AND INNOVATIONS

3.1 History and description of the problem

The Gurupira community whose livelihoods were endangered due to a large encroaching gully on their only water supply, approached Environment Africa for help through our partner organisation in the area, the Lower Gurube Development Association, in 1998. Women realised that a gully was approaching a borehole from which the community get their water for drinking and for watering the livestock. They approached their Kraal head and a solution had to be found. The community also approached the Lower Gurube Development Association (LGDA). LGDA supported the community with vetiver grass and trees that were planted in the gully but was not successful in stopping its progression. The parties realised there was more required in terms of expertise and organisation to successfully address this problem.

LDGA approached their partner Environment Africa for help. EAfrica followed up the request and carried out, together with the community, a mini survey of the situation. It was found out that the eight-acre gully was threatening the only water source for 385 families and their livestock as well as large sections of arable land. EAfrica responded to the request and at a stakeholder workshop three key objectives were set, which were:

- To empower the local community to take ownership of their issues at hand and develop an implementation plan in a collaborative manner;
- To save the water supply, a borehole and reclaim the gully; and
- To achieve sustainable use of the immediate surrounding natural resources and improve livelihoods within the community for current and future generations.

3.2 Implementation Methodology

Once EAfrica decided to work with the community, a participatory process aimed at building capacity and empowering the community to take care of their problem was initiated. This was done through specific activities with clearly defined inputs and outputs. Discussions and workshops were carried out in the “community centre” which is under a tree. This is where all community issues are discussed and solutions found by consensus. From there the community, together with the facilitators, would move to work in the project area on what ever issue was being discussed, true to African tradition. *This is "sustainable development" the African way.*

3.2.1 Community Problem Assessment

The focus of this activity was to impart skills to the community on problem assessment, so that the community could identify the causes of the gully. The problems were identified as:

- Overgrazing resulting in loss of ground cover and increased run-off;

- Lack of contour protection in the fields, and run-off would than concentrate in the plough furrows;
- Paths from both animals and people creating small waterways; and
- Use of sledges and pulling of ploughs without protection.

The community acknowledged that all the above could be managed with cooperation from every one.

3.2.2 Needs Assessment

Needs assessment was done to identify what resources were required to rehabilitate the gully. These were identified as:

- Management of the above by coming with community by-laws. It was agree that would be done through a constitution for the project;
- Locally available materials such as stones and logs would be used. The amount of stones required and the distances involved required a vehicle to transport;
- The group would provide labour; and
- Vetiver grass was going to be used to support the stone checks. It was therefore necessary to establish a nursery.

Activities from this process were:

- Planting of vetiver grass by the community with technical support from EAfrica. This was done using the grass that was sourced by LGDA from the local DDF nursery;
- Collection of stones, logs and other materials and transporting them to the project site. Transport was provided by LGDA; and
- Mobilising the community and planning for the building of the stone checks.

3.3 Field Days ("nhimbe" in Shona)

A field day was organised to bring together all the technical partners that would facilitate the building of stone checks and planting of vetiver. Agritex, DNR, LGDA and Forestry Commission, attended as technical partners and EAfrica facilitated.

The community's enthusiasm was evident through singing and dancing as they shared and participated equally in the hard work, both young and old, men and women.

Activities

Work was concentrated on the main gully. The community would continue to work on the other fingers of the gully at their own pace and continue watering and tendering the vetiver that was planted.

The local Agritex and DNR officers did monitoring and EAfrica would assist with fencing material for the conservation area. Agritex and DNR would peg the conservation

area up stream of the project area. The Kraal head and the local council assured the people whose fields were going to be affected that they will be given alternative fields.

3.4 Community mobilisation and conflict resolution

EAfrica initiated this process after realising that progress was slow due to a number of conflicts that were taking place between community groups that had different backgrounds.

Forestry Commission members - this is a group whose focus was to plant trees and they had played a leading role during the planting of vetiver and gum trees.

Political parties: the parties wanted people to attend their meetings on project working days

It was agreed that:

- (a) There was need to formalise the group by forming a committee with a chairperson secretary and their deputies and five members;
- (b) A constitution be drawn that would be the guiding principle for the project; and
- (c) The community leadership, the Kraal head, council and political parties agreed that project work would take priority over the political meetings.

3.5 Achievements from the first phase

Within the first year the community had established their own vetiver grass nursery and the encouraging things noted, were that:

- The community participated and took ownership of their project;
- They learnt a lot from their conflicts and are now able to organise themselves for community activities;
- The community provided labour and were willing to spent time working on the project;
- Men and women were and continue to be equally involved in the project;
- Other groups in the area have seen the success of this project and have approached the Gurupira Community for assistance and advice;
- The gully had been reclaimed and the borehole is now safe for the community;
- The community wanted to expand their project and again requested for the assistance from EAfrica with the aim of establishing income-generating projects in the reclaimed gully area and its surrounds.

3.6 The second phase of the project.

The second phase of the project involved the community and partners to develop a plan for the conservation and sustainable use of their environment. This phase focused on the

objective of adding value to the natural resources in the project area and its surrounds, and to ensure sustainability and improved livelihoods.

A number of field days were held to attend to the other fingers of the gully and to plant trees, especially *Jatropha* and bananas.

The first harvesting of thatch grass was done this season and the income generated is being directed towards other income generating projects.

A workshop on bee-keeping has been held and beehives are already mounted. The first honey harvest is expected within the next few weeks. There is a big potential for viable commercial project on honey because of the improved forage within the project area and surrounding areas.

4.0 PARTNERS

4.1 External Support: Environment Africa

EAfrica facilitated the process of involving other key stakeholders, which contributed to allowing each partner to participate in a positive manner utilising their strengths. The organisation has played a mediating role when conflicts arose among the members of the community. Support has also been provided through participatory discussions.

Visits have been undertaken by staff to check on progress, and this is greatly appreciated by the community. The visits act as a monitoring tool on action items agreed on.

EAfrica has also donated fencing and other materials, which are not available locally. Local workshops have also been sponsored.

4.2 Local support

4.2.1. LGDA

The Lower Gurube Development Association (LGDA) is a community based NGO that is a key link between Gurupira Community and EAfrica. LGDA provides a base station for the community to come to when they require further assistance. They provided a lorry to transport stones to the gully and there is more potential for this partnership. Current discussions are that the community will become a member of LGDA, which will make them eligible for financial support. The support given now is on goodwill and is motivated by the amount of effort the community is putting towards solving their own problems.

LGDA will provide technical advice and conduct training workshops, through its Animators on Project Management and other issues as required by the community. EAfrica has linked up the community with other community initiatives in the area, have field visits and

Help joint marketing of produce so that the community can benefit from economies of scale.

4.2.2 Government Extension

The Department of Natural Resources(DNR) assisted with technical advice where necessary on the management of natural resources. The extension officer checks on the work done in reclaiming the gully on a more regular basis than Eafrika.

Agritex provided assistance on proper contour management and carried out workshops on how the community can easily undertake and design their own contours utilizing natural materials. Both the DNR and Agritex are government departments and therefore also link the project to other initiatives in the country. This has contributed to capacity building of the local community. The assistance continues as and when the community asks Agritex or DNR for assistance.

Forestry Commission assisted during the planting of vetiver grass, bananas and Jatropha trees. Forestry Commission will continue to assist the community as and when required especially now with the planting and grafting of trees.

4.2.3 RDC

The Rural District Council is the custodian of the environment on behalf of government. Their main contribution is the attendance at important functions of the District Administrator (DA) and other council officials. They have attended tree planting days, the hand over ceremony and other important occasions. This helps highlight the project to other councillors and the community gets feed back on national issues and assistance that is available from the council. At the hand over ceremony the DA announced that council had a budget for conservation works from which the community could draw funds for the gully reclamation works.

Giving support to extension officers, the DA urged the people to listen to the technical advice from the extension officers, support which is appreciated by the officers.

Legislative support. The Council is an important partner to the project as it has legal and legislative powers in the area and gave its full endorsement to the project. This allowed all partners to work freely in the area and therefore assisted with the easy progress of the project.

4.2.4 Schools

Mahuwe Primary School services Gurupira Village. The is a communication base for the village. The children attending the school come from the Gurupira area and therefore have benefited and also participated in the project.

The Gurupira Community works closely with the school. For the past two years the school has been coming first in the National Environment Schools Competition. The school has developed a nursery with an impressive selection of indigenous trees that are available to the surrounding communities. This is an important link which provides the children with an opportunity to practice what they learn at School on receptive parents.

5.0 SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT.

This project is a lesson on sustainable development. Initially the project was set out to save the only water source for the community and whilst this has been achieved, the project has developed in a process-oriented manner involving all sectors, genders, ages and ideas thus evolving into what we see today, a success story. It addresses poverty, biodiversity, and financial sustainability.

5.1 Poverty reduction

The protection of the community's source of livelihood, water, has resulted in improved capacity for the community to look at the resources that they have and improve the benefits they generate from them. This project has reduced the dependence on one source of income, cotton growing. This reduces the people's exposure to droughts.

The *Jatropha* plantation is at an advanced stage and by the end of the year the community will be reaping their first crop which will provide them with income; Some of the products to be produced from the *Jatropha* oil include soap and oil for use in cookers.

A vegetable garden has been successfully developed and is providing food to the surrounding community. Experiments are being done to make indigenous fruits more acceptable to children by processing them. Future plans are in place to grow citrus fruits and mushrooms; however, there is an exciting plan ahead, which links the community bee-keeping project to the commercial sector.

5.2 Biodiversity

Results have been:

- The community has reclaimed the gully and this has improved foliage;
- One of the indicators for the success of the project is that small game have come back into the area;
- Level of environmental awareness is very high and other communities have started their own projects. Many groups and individuals have started to follow the example set by the Gurupira Community. EAfrica has already assisted two other income-generating projects in the area;
- All projects have an environmental base to start from using the Gurupira project as a role model; and
- Agritex has agreed to pegged conservation works in the arable lands above the gully to minimise soil erosion.

The improved vegetation within the project area provides an important lesson to the community on how human activity can impact on the natural resources to a level where their yield is reduced. The recovery is due to controlled activity, that is, control of fires, controlled movement of stock and people.

6.0 PROJECT SUSTAINABILITY

This initiative has been in operation since 1998 and continues to grow in stature with the community expanding their operations and improving their income base.

6.1 Social capacity

The key social elements that make this initiative sustainable include the following:

- A strong partnership link with all key stakeholders that is open and transparent;
- There is strong buy-in and participation from women and men as well as the youth;
- The community are expanding their projects and sharing their successes with their surrounding communities;
- The school activities support the community initiatives making teachers expertise available directly to the communities.
- The voice of the children, as the future custodians of the environment, is beginning to be heard through this partnership.

The community have come up with their own slogan, “No Land Is Waste Land in Our Area.”

6.2 The Institutional Framework

The key institutional elements that make this initiative sustainable include the following:

The community have institutionalised the way they operate by forming a small committee called the Gurupira Environment Action Group. This group comprises of a chairperson and secretary and group members from their community. People volunteer for these positions and this ensures transparency and equal participation from both sexes and age groups. The informal village traditions have been adopted. Even though there is a committee most meetings are free for all and every body has equal opportunity to speak.

The Natural Resources Act empowers the Natural Resources Board to make an order for conservation of natural resources, which relate to, in this case:

- i) *The prohibition or restriction or limitation of the depasturing or movement of stock;*
- ii) *The provision or restriction of cultivation or use or the method of cultivation of the land;*
- iii) *The control of water, including storm water; and*

iv) *The cutting, felling, injury to or the destruction of vegetation whatsoever.*

It is the DNR officer's responsibility to police these provisions.

The Rural District Councils Act –general bylaws (communal and resettlement land)(land use and conservation) by-laws,1998 has the following provisions:

- i) *The preparation and adoption of a plan if requested to do so by the village development committee. The plan covers the land areas set aside for exclusive use by inhabitants for residential, grazing or cultivation purposes;*
- ii) *Banning the use and ownership of a sleighs; and*
- iii) *Protection of vegetation and natural resources including cutting down of trees, picking or removal of indigenous plants, collection of wood and removal of wild life.*

The constitution provides the legislative framework for the groups' operations. Since this was drafted by the group through a participatory process it is respected and easy to enforce. The constitution is acceptable to the extension services department and the Rural District Council since it operationalises the existing national legislation. Some of the issues covered in the constitution, in line with the above legislation, are the following conservation requirements:

- Use of sledges has been banned;
- Harvesting in the project area is by consensus;
- Tendering for planted trees is compulsory; and
- Harvesting for building timber and firewood is controlled and monitored.

The Kraal head's traditional role as the community leader has been adopted in this project. The rare instances when members refuse to abide by the constitutional requirements, these have been referred to him and amicably resolved. Non-members are required to comply with conservation requirements and, since they are not bound by the constitution, the Kraal head ensures their compliance.

The endorsement and continued support from the Rural District Council, whom the community operate under is an essential ingredient to the sustainability of the project.

6.3 Financial Capacity.

The key financial elements that make this initiative sustainable include the following:

- The community is earning an income from sale of their produce;
- The community has linked up with a commercial company who are interested in purchasing all the honey that they produce, thus guaranteeing the community a ready market. The company is also interested in the soap products as well as any other possible products produced;

- The community has built up their capacity in managing their own finances and basic record keeping which will assist the community when they need to obtain any further start-up funding;
- Environment Africa have linked up with one of the largest Zimbabwe banks who are keen to work with local communities in micro finance and are currently looking at the Gurupira community and other EAfrica partners;
- The local community will be utilised by Environment Africa as trainers for other community like-minded projects, thus generating further income to them; and
- Council conservation budget is available for the community to tap into for expansion activities.

6.3 The ecological capacity

The key ecological elements that make this initiative sustainable include the following:

- The gully has been reclaimed and the water supply secured with an operational borehole and plenty of water;
- There are enough trees in the area to undertake a good bee-keeping project, which will encourage the community to protect and look after the trees, grow more trees and earn an increased income.

The whole project is focused on the sustainable use of biodiversity.

7.0 LESSONS LEARNT

The clarity of organisation created an environment conducive for project implementation and progress. It has been emphasised by EAfrica and the partner organisations that it is the responsibility of the community to identify issues that threatened their livelihoods and to come up with solutions. Where capacity does not exist within, then they shall seek assistance from outside. However, the community admits that they need a "push" when it comes to progress. EAfrica has assumed this role and it does the monitoring and evaluation of the project through field visits. Schools play the same role, when the project becomes part of their community out reach program. Schools environmental competitions provide the incentive.

The Gurupira community took this challenge and provided the social leadership on the ground and all the physical labour for the project. They also provided the indigenous knowledge of the area and systems that work in the area. They provided the necessary motivation and vision together with their enthusiasm, which has led to a successful project.

The role played by the institutional leadership as discussed throughout this report cannot be over emphasised. The Rural District Council provides strategic direction through its conservation programs and political support through the local councillor who is democratically elected. Forestry Commission runs a successful afforestation program that encourages the communities to plant trees in their plots. The DNR has an officer who

provides expertise on natural resource management. Agritex provides expertise on good agricultural practice.

These extension services are not adequately equipped and their coverage is minimal. Where a project already exists as a community initiative, they will react to specific requests. The death of two officers resulted in a gap as they have not been replaced. As a result, a request to peg the conservation works upstream of the project area has not been fulfilled as a result.

The community does not understand the functions of the extension services. It was the facilitator's role to point out the assistance that is available from them.

Lack of knowledge is a disadvantage for the community. For example, the *Jatropha* trees were died due to moisture stress. The community concluded that the plants had pests, this was only clarified when the extension officers visited the project.

The general shortage of water is affecting the expansion plans of the group. It is expected that LGDA will assist with drilling of another borehole. LGDA will play an important role in the implementation of community-based projects. They will need financial support from the government.

Distance from the school, that has the capacity to assist with community education, makes it difficult for the community to benefit . The community has volunteered to send a few members at a time and these will come and work as educators for the other members.

There is a high level of awareness on the importance of our environment amongst the community and they are keen to utilise their environment in a sustainable manner. Other communities are replicating what the Gurupira Community are doing and the positive impacts on the environment are mushrooming in the area, a truly positive and encouraging sign.

One of the biggest impacts that have been derived from the partnership is the concept and the importance of working together and utilising each other's strengths thus allowing the projects to achieve higher and quicker goals. One of the important factors in the partnership is the transparency and openness amongst the partners, which has assisted all to achieve the end results. The partnership has also created friendships and an interest to find out what is happening next at the Gurupira community. It has also allowed a time of sharing and fun.

8.0 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

When a community shares a vision it is possible to overcome constraints of inadequate resources and come up with sustainable solutions to their problems. The level of participation will depend on how much the community believes in the intervention. Once every one had agreed on what needed to be done for the conservation works, people

worked together, young and old, women and men in equal partnership. While it is important to make tangible benefits clear to the community, it is more important to win their trust through establishing a lasting friendship. In this project keeping promises made and clarifying roles and responsibilities at the beginning achieved this.

This project was successful without injection of a lot of capital. There was no donor funding and no project proposal. It was small contributions from the project partners that made this project a success. This proves that if the community is committed they will achieve their goals.

Participatory methods should take cognisance of the informal setting in most rural areas. In this case study it was observed that facilitators should come up with flexible methodologies that suit the levels and pace of learning of the recipients. While there was a committee that was selected to run the project, everyone was free to attend project meetings.

Legal framework is necessary for the development of management plans. This is provided in the Natural Resources Act. At village level it is more the unwritten rules that work. The people at this level are not aware of the legislation that applies. In this project the community came up with their own by-laws, which were enforced by the traditional leadership.

The technical partners facilitate the monitoring and evaluation of the project. The community is aware of the benefits from the intervention but nothing is recorded. During participatory evaluation everybody tells their story of what has been achieved, the challenges and future plans.

8.1 Concluding remark

While theories and principles are important to researchers and facilitators, communities want more action and less talk. "Sustainable development" the African way.