

End of First Year Report: Livelihood Security in a Changing Environment – Zimbabwe

Overview of aims: This *action learning* project aims to explore the value of organic certification as a market tool to increase income opportunities for natural producers who cannot afford expensive agricultural inputs like pesticides and fertilisers. Training with impoverished communal smallholders in Mashonaland East province has been complemented by market research on growing domestic demand, and establish solid supply chains. This demand already outstrips supply, and is currently serviced by commercial growers in South Africa, while Zimbabwean smallholders remain net recipients of food aid.



Beneficiaries

Target Group 1: Producer Associations (591 trained famers forming 32 assocs):

Direct: 233 male / 358 female

Indirect beneficiaries (families): 1,747 male / 1,613 female

Target Group 2: Smallholders with access to information via 16 trained Min of Ag extension officers:

Direct: 5,488 male / 5,712 female

Indirect (extension to other officers via 2 demo sites): 5,721 male / 6,070 female

Target Group 3: Existing Organic Members (benefiting from incorp of national organic standards):

Direct: 147 male / 153 female

Indirect (family members): 882 male / 918 female

Target Group 3: consumers to be included in year 2 calculations

Total beneficiaries *to date* = 29,042

Significant Achievements Feb 2011- Feb 2012:

MoU with Ministry of Agriculture extension services (AGRITEX) provided permissions and support for work in Mashonaland East. Extension officers were involved in candidate shortlisting, and received training in organic conservation agriculture to improve levels of institutional capacity for ongoing support to farmers.

8 training blocks/weeks, & monthly on-farm assessment with peer group (associations) has resulted in the transfer of skills to members of 32 associations = changing practice & increased productive diversity.

Organic standards & compliance training has been held with all associations to establish the parameters for organic production for members. Along with community mapping, this resulted in the establishment of their own compliance agreements – involving community leaders to reinforce adherence, and resolve any arising concerns or conflict.

Compliance visits have been made to each association, confirming that all are working in compliance with their own compliance agreements, and therefore standards – and are therefore on track to supply niche markets.



4 associations, with virgin land, attained organic certification, and a further 2 have attained partial certification (based on *some* virgin land). All other associations are in full compliance, and 'under conversion'.

Demonstrations at AGRITEX district offices have been established to disseminate information on natural fertility & pest management to other officers. 40 officers work out of each district office. We plan to support the development of demos at 3 further offices over the duration of the project.

Participatory 'expansive learning' sessions resulted in farmers identifying key challenges & developing strategies for change. This resulted in associations taking practical actions to resolve issues themselves – ie: developing work teams to mend impassable roads, resolutions to livestock problems which were damaging land/soils, and leadership issues.

Consultation with supermarkets & wholesalers, for initial market penetration, has confirmed that a premium would be paid once national organic standards are in place, and the market more established. This now requires following up to hold buyers to this commitment.

Research on organic market trends was undertaken, and disseminated at a well attended event hosted by ZOPPA – leading to press articles & increased awareness. While the second piece of research, focussing on more detailed & localised market demand, was disseminated amongst the producers associations during meetings in each locale.

National Organic Standards were formally incorporated in to the Standards Association of Zimbabwe in November – the fastest incorporation of any standards in the country's history.



Sale of certified organic produce is already underway, as is the sale of produce by other associations not yet fully certified (but under conversion). Eight associations are selling well, while the majority are making headway with sales to local markets.

Achievements against projected outcomes:

OUTCOME 1: 20/32 ASSOCIATIONS STRENGTHEN THEIR COLLECTIVE NATURAL RESOURCE-BASE RESULTING IN INCREASED NATURAL CAPACITY FOR SUSTAINABLE GROWTH & LIVELIHOODS.

1) AGRITEX officers engage in process: Presentation of 64 candidates for selection training by 16 (pre-selected) AGRITEX officers – resulting in selection of 32 'access' farmers for full training.

2) Training for Transformation (TfT) improves peer selection & organisational development: Selection of an average of 20 peers by each access farmer – for establishment of associations & peer transfer at farm level. 32 associations established.

3) OCA training addresses resource issues: 32 assoc's receiving training & support to develop sustainable land-use systems to increase productive capacity. Regular monitoring visits reveal that the majority of associations are working well together - all associations have constitutions agreed - and are using the techniques to improve soil fertility and pest management as taught in training, and are producing a variety of crops.

Additional Activity: AGRITEX officers x 16 have also received a weeks training in organic conservation agriculture (OCA) to bring them up to speed with what farmers have been learning – to enable them to better support the needs of the associations. 2/5 district offices have set up demonstrations on

natural soil fertility and natural pest control remedies showing increased assimilation of trained material, now being shared more widely.

4) Attitudes to productive environment shifts: Record keeping being undertaken by each (ie: attendance at meetings, financial management, planting & harvest data) demonstrating shifting attitudes to natural & human resource management.

5) Progress attracts local interest & enquiries: Increased interest from external actors visiting gardens – including 1 press day - leading to swelling membership and then a levelling off.



OUTCOME 2: 75% OF PRODUCERS IN 20/32 ASSOCIATIONS ESTABLISH SYSTEMS WHICH COMPLY WITH ORGANIC STANDARDS, RESULTING IN INCREASED ACCESS TO MARKETS & INCOME BY THE END OF THE PROJECT.

1) Existing Demand Identified: Two surveys have been undertaken – the first to assess national trends towards organic market development, and the second, a more details assessment of demand which relates specifically to producers in Mashonaland East – both provincial & Harare markets for certified organic and other fresh produce (for those under conversion) such as schools, hospitals, and small traders. The assessment of Harare markets involved consultation with supermarkets and wholesalers with distribution points in Harare.

2) Producers linked to demand: The resulting information has been presented to association representatives, which resulted in all associations being introduced to buyers - leading to some making sales and future orders.

3) Training clarifies guidance on standards & 4) compliance: 4 associations have attained full certification, while 28 are under conversion. Local leadership relating to each association has been supportive, many attending standards & compliance training held at community level, and willingly becoming part of the compliance monitoring process. (ZOPPA)

5) Attitudes to market transformed: It is too early to state whether ‘quality of produce’ is being sustained (yr 2 indicator), as for many this quality continues to be a challenge. At the time of writing, this only relates to those who have made market connections which require them to upgrade their skills for quality & presentation (packing). While market supply was not intended until year 2, two associations in particular have shown excellent aptitude, undertaking market research & getting organic products to market, providing a bench mark for others. Most associations are selling, with 8 are progressing particularly well.

6) Producers take ownership of challenges: The majority of association have benefited from participatory action research workshops held at community level, better described as ‘expansive learning’ – facilitated by Dr Mukute. This process has encouraged questioning and analysis of a key ‘problem’ agreed by each association as one that they want to address. While attendance levels at each association varied, the process saw them model responses and initiate an activity to achieve the desired change. At the final session, each association was encouraged reflect & report on the actions initiated and to consolidate – resulting in an understanding that they can address challenges themselves by



agreeing upon, and taking appropriate action. For those few assoc's who benefitted less, these are considered to have related to fundamental leaderships and organisational issues, but for the most part, this has resulted in some successful actions and increased confidence.

7) Revolving fund promotes effective investment: A revolving fund was created by each association, with an initial investment of \$100 per association from the project grant. The intention was to support input requirements (ie: seed, hire of transport etc). The majority of assoc's (each of which has a treasurer) are loaning amounts out to members with interest, while others have devised more centrally managed purchasing and distribution systems. All assoc's are keeping records on expenditure and income related to the fund. Outcomes have been mixed, some with minimal increases due to poor crop choices, and failure to meet planting times. However, the majority of associations recorded average increases of 80%. And 8 associations, which have managed to capitalise on market links via the project, have recorded 300-500% increases.



OUTCOME 3: PUBLIC AWARENESS CAMPAIGN RESULTS IN INCREASED DEMAND FOR ORGANICS, & ADVOCACY INFLUENCES POLICY RECOGNITION OF ORGANIC AGRICULTURE - RESULTING IN INCREASED SUPPORT TO INCENTIVISE ORGANIC SECTOR DEVELOPMENT.

1) AGRITEX engaged in process: Largely this has been the case, but some officers are more dedicated and 'engaged' than others. Officers, provided with an 'incentive' which may include a lunch, attend the support visits with the team from FPC once a month – which take a day (visiting each of the 2 assoc's they support). They have also attended the participatory expansive learning sessions with Dr Mukute and, on the whole, the organic standards training & compliance monitoring, alongside ZOPPA. In fact at 1 of Dr Mukute's sessions, 5 officers attended.

In approx half of the cases, officers support the farmers' process after each training week – assisting in the implementation on the ground. They have also stepped in to resolve any conflicts between members. The 2 Hwedza officers have been very hands-on, pegging the plots with farmers and improving storm drainage patterns. This is laudable given that their own institution is faced with mobility & motivation issues.

2) Market points are more aware of organic benefits: the initial visibility exercise amongst traders/buyers & market points have been undertaken in the form of the market research, involving discussions with buyers, during which the benefits of organics were discussed. It is too early to know whether this has had an impact on buying patterns, as for traders this needs to be demand driven and will take greater visibility of the issues amongst the end-user (yr2). (ZOPPA)

3) Producers voices are strengthened: access to decision makers - planned for year 2 (ZOPPA) There are a few cases (Hwedza and Goromonzi) where groups have shown strength in terms of negotiating prices, despite the fact that their payments come late. Most of the groups now have increased awareness of the right to choose markets that are responsive to their needs and demands. In fact, ahead of schedule, 2 associations have taken the initiative, and hosted public awareness and demonstration days – with around 450 people attending – including local leaders, dignitaries, consumers, buyers and press.

4) Decision makers engage with shifting policy debates: after drafting, consultation and redrafting, the national organic standards are now in place – having been formally incorporated into the Standards Association of Zimbabwe (SAZ) in the fastest recorded time. These are aligned with IFOAM recommendations, and are compliant with EU and US standards to enable Zim producers to these markets export in the future. Other activities towards this outcome are not planned until yr 2.

5) Debates articulated for review by policy makers: While this is underway, via 2 events attended by representatives from ministries, consumers, producers & media, reporting on this outcome is planned for year 2 (all partners)

6) Consumer confidence increases: With the certification of the first 4 associations who are now able to trade under the 'Zim-Organic' trademark, and the resulting orders and sales of these association (assured a premium in due course) we can ascertain that there is a renewed confidence by the these 2 major buyers (supermarket/wholesaler) in organics – and will be promoted as such to their consumers/customers. We therefore consider this outcome to be well underway – although much work on this will be required in year 2 (re increasing consumer awareness).

OUTCOME 4: M&E CONSOLIDATES LEARNING FROM ACTION RESEARCH - INCREASING POTENTIAL OF ROLL-OUT, AND RESULTING IN MORE SMALLHOLDERS & CONSUMERS IN FURTHER PROVINCES GAINING ACCESS TO, AND BENEFITTING FROM, ORGANIC TRAINING & CERTIFICATION

1) Change outcomes monitored: regular (now quarterly) reviews allow time to run through our project mapping tools – through which we can monitor progress against our measurement indicators, and discuss whether these remain relevant and/or appropriate. These sessions are facilitated by Practical Action Zimbabwe, and attended by all partners.

2) Training remains responsive & relevant to needs: as per below (4.3) and where possible, amendments are made to the existing programme of activities, and additional elements added (within budget, also where possible). All are aware that while this may be the first group to attend this OCA training and wider programme, we are keen to provide the best opportunities available to them as we learn, rather than simply putting it down to *learning*, to be rectified during a roll-out. In this sense, the training has remained extremely responsive – once to the detriment of the overall process (as already mentioned in outcome 1: TfT). This is also part of our learning.

3) Information assimilated for learning: quarterly meetings remain a critical opportunity to discuss issues which have arisen in the previous quarter, and to plan strategies for addressing gaps and challenges. These have worked well, and remain vibrant discussions. The resulting evaluation of activities in line with overall objectives will be found in our final report & publication (below)

4) Dissemination of project findings: publication & presentation of report on the potential of organic agriculture (year 2).



Personalising these achievements:

The commitment of these farmers is quite astounding. With so many promises of a better future, these farmers are now pinning their hopes on organic markets to improve their lives. At this early stage, and in the absence of significant change data, perhaps an anecdote can illustrate this.

Having spent 2 days training in organic standards & compliance, all members of an assoc swear a pledge (on a bible and in the presence of a preacher – Zambian model) without which they can not become certified organic producers. This is taken so seriously that one man felt unable to take the pledge, in case he inadvertently failed to comply. If someone misses the pledge at their own association, they must travel to the next association, where the same training takes place the following week. Due to family commitments or long-awaited medical appointments, many members have had to undertake what can be a long journey.



Shortly after the final pledges had been taken in this particular community, an elderly man, accompanied by his son, appeared on bicycles hoping to take their pledge. Catching his breath, this gentle man disappeared to the drop toilet to change, emerged

immaculately presented in a shirt & tie, and proudly took the bible in his hand on which to make his pledge. It was incredibly humbling.

When giving them a lift home, we calculated that they had cycled 72 kms on tar and dirt roads – taking 9 hrs - on bald, ripped and deflated tyres. When we parted, he said that he believed that 'organic farming held the answers for a better life'.

Update:

With the success of this first year, GardenAfrica recently learned from Comic Relief that we have secured a further £56,000 to augment this project with climate sensitive activities. These will include 4 further training weeks: bee keeping & organic honey production; natural pest management specific to Kew tests on effective indigenous pesticidal plants; value addition of 'waste' produce (resulting from quality demanded by supermarkets); and participatory market mapping and value chain upgrading. We will also be undertaking soil tests at each association, lobbying the international organic body (IFOAM) regarding regulations on organic conversion (up to 5 years) which were designed for countries with high use of chemical inputs & resulting residues (North America & Europe). We aim to highlight this as a considerable disincentive to the uptake of sustainable agricultural practices, and to question its relevance to African smallholders who have in the past used minimal inputs due to cost. The private sector will also be engaged in a series of meetings with NGOs and producers focused on market access, in order to draw distribution points closer to producers, addressing transaction costs and food miles, and resulting waste.

Thank you

GardenAfrica is now able to implement this initiative with full funding, thanks to additional support from the Rowan Trust, Erach & Roshan Sadri Foundation, and the Allan & Nesta Ferguson Charitable Trust. This action learning phase is due to end in August, when we will present our findings to related ministries in Zimbabwe (Health, Environment, Agriculture, Trade). We look forward to reporting fully on our learning, case studies, and how this affects our planning for the next stage.