

Appendix C(a)

Story of Change and Re-awakening in Bikita, Zimbabwe

January 2015 to January 2016

By Method Gundidza

When Mupo began working in the 3 Bikita communities they each had organized groups of farmers involved in communal gardens. Over the last year they have become increasingly engaged in dialogues which have stimulated them to revive their knowledge and practices. The women particularly have demonstrated strong leadership qualities in motivating fellow women and men farmers in the community to maintain and improve their communal gardens and fields so that they can feed families and generated funds to support families.

As the dialogues have deepened, the women have shown that they have a rich knowledge of their indigenous seeds and foods, which has been unspoken or hidden. As they remember the seeds they have lost, so the passion for reviving them grows. They realize what treasures they have let go of without even realizing this. They vow to hold on to them and to ensure that their children receive the same rich heritage that they had passed on to them.

Below are extracts from the dialogues, reflecting the re-awakening of memory and the realization of the importance of the seeds, knowledge and practices that they are losing. Some reflections also of how they are applying their learning. The story of how a community begins to reawaken is reflected in these extracts. They are on a journey of rediscovery. It comes in bits and pieces of reflection and memory. As one remembers something, it triggers the memory of others. It also builds passion and commitment to bring the memory and practices back, and that is what builds the momentum.

It is a commitment for the participants, because they have busy lives. But the commitment grows as the memory grows. As they rediscover lost seeds and agree to share them and bring them back to life. As they learn more about AE, building on what they know, and they see this improves their farming, they become more enthused. It is also a story of how a community rebuilds its cohesion, as it remembers its story. As the memory returns it weaves the community relationships and interdependency back too. And thus the journey unfolds.

Reflections and anecdotes from a community journey:

Mai Kasvosve, the Chairperson, Dende Communal Garden, gave feedback of the Seed Fair they had attended in Shashe. She spoke in great detail about the many varieties of seed she has seen and benefits of indigenous seeds identified during the Shashe Fair, especially how seeds are related to sacred sites and the preservation of culture and identity. She also shared how the 'seed game' was a war waged on indigenous communities by big multinational corporations owned by our former colonial masters. She spoke passionately about the political games being played to keep communities under 'smart colonialism' which we thought we fought against and won. She

shared the example of Mupata in Gutu who are working on the revival of their seeds, restoration of their land, wetlands and forests. Other farmers also added. A very rich conversation ensued, which was evidence of the comprehension that they demonstrated of what had been discussed at the seed fair.



Figure 1: Mrs Mercy Kasvova Gaiko – Chairperson Dende Communal garden, Chiroorwe, Bikita, Zimbabwe reporting back to community about a Seed Fair experience at Shashe(Aug 2015)

- “Shezha” a crop that was grown in “Mushongorokwa” river up there near the school but there is nothing now, not even a trace of it.
- “Chisi” is the day reserved for no work when people do not do anything is no longer observed. This day was not a fixed day of the week like Wednesday but was read from the moon cycle i.e. when the moon first appears “tenderekedzuwe” then we would count 3 days “motsi, piri, tatu chive chisi”. People would observe this day and not work. For those who worked, unfortunate things would happen to their fields like maybe baboons or other wild animals like “makwizo” would come and eat all the plants. This practice allowed our land, and ourselves, to rest.



Figure 2: Mrs Mercy Kasvova Gaiko – Chairperson Dende Communal garden, Chiroorwe, Bikita, Zimbabwe showing their community garden (Aug 2015)



Figure 3: A picture showing the section of the Dende garden in Chiroorwe where they grew OPV maize as a pilot test case. After harvest the seed would have been shared with the greater community but sadly all the maize crop wilted (Jan 2016)

Mai Mugano, the Treasurer of Mabheka Communal garden, gave very detailed feedback of the Shashe Seed Fair. She shared in great detail about the varieties and importance of the indigenous seeds she had recognised during the Fair.



Figure 4: Extreme left: Mrs Mugano (Mabheka Garden Treasurer), and 3rd from Left Mrs Turugare(Secretary) together with fellow garden members (Aug 2015)



Figure 5: Women farmers from Bikita sorting their seeds to display at the Seed Fair held at Shashe (Aug 2015)

- **The mother of Mai Turugare**, the secretary, grew and harvested finger millet in 2009 and she is still eating the porridge from that harvest even today 6 years later.
- Water melon seeds were ground to make butter which was used to cook dried beef “chimukuyu”
- “It is amazing that you come here and ask the elders to talk...where did you come from? Are you really the son from Gundidza family or are you lying? Now let me tell you...when we grew up we did not eat maize meal, our staple was “Mhunga neRukweza” (pearl and finger millet porridge) only. This maize thing started yesterday.”
- For the millet we always planted it before the rains came and by October we would already be having plants in the field. If you planted later than this the plants would not grow “chaita chibhareta”
- If we wanted to plant in lines (the modern way) we would tie some ropes to sausages (fruit of sausage tree) and pull them to create lines then bury the seeds. No matter how hot it becomes the millet does not die completely. It will dry up but the moment the rains come, it will reshoot. This reminds me of the year when after a very bad season the rains came after the plants had dried and my millet began to grow, and I had a good harvest. You cannot lose everything when you grow millet.



Fig 6: A farmer in Gangare in their Pearl & Finger millet field intercropped with water melons. She used to grow maize here but changed to millet this season in line with our encouragement in the dialogues (Jan 2016)

- I do not have cattle and so don't have manure and draught power but this does not stop me from harvesting year in year out because I would just dig up holes and plant my seeds. This kept the soils intact and protected the rivers from getting clogged by erosion of soils.

- We grew maize but only around the anthills so that we could eat green mealies not the whole field like what we do nowadays.
- Pearl and Finger millet can be grown from nurseries. In fact, if during planting, you drop too many seeds you can actually transplant some of the plants..."musimwa"
- Harvest of these crops would be stored in a completely sealed off granary so that if the grass thatched store got burnt, the food would be saved
- Sorghum matures quickly so you can avert hunger by planting it early so that you can harvest and dry it for food even when some crops are still in the field.
- We use these seed for beer and porridge so we will not let go of these seeds as they are very important to us
- When the "mubvumira" tree's leaves turn yellow then you know that the jugo beans are ready to be eaten
- Harvesting a lot of finger millet was a sign of being a good farmer. You can harvest this crop many times in a season as long as there is rain "hurududu...madungirwa tapedze kukohwa"
- We had a practice called "mudirira," where a farmer would go borrow seed from others after assessing what they wanted to plant and found they were short of seed. They will harvest very well and be able to repay the debt.
- "Mushosho" refers to pearl millet/sorghum which is ripe but still wet and elders take this and eat it raw
- After remembering that they had a yellow tomatoe, there was a long silence, as if in mourning. Then eventually only one elderly woman emerged to have "Mharupwa," the indigenous yellow tomato variety. She agreed to share it so they could revive it again in the community.

Some reflections of the participants in the January 2016 dialogues from the baseline community mapping:

- The elderly woman described ‘svoboda’ as “... “A very special indigenous seed that I will not grow this year because the heavens don’t look promising with good rains...” She promised to share the little seed she has with others in the group for next planting season.
- As a result of our dialogues and training so far, some of us have already dug pits to store cattle manure before putting it on the field. This is what we learnt from the Shashe Exchange Visit in August 2015.
- Millet was a very rare crop here in Mamutse but this year the crop is back...go and look at the fields and see for yourself. If our crops don’t survive we will be in danger of having no seed next season.



Fig 7: A healthy pearl millet crop in Mamutse at the foot of the Sacred mountain (Jan 2016)