

MTG Report Gokwe

By Peter Ronalds July 2016



Background:

The 5th MTG Course in Africa was held in Gokwe, Zimbabwe. Gokwe region is one of the poorest areas of Zimbabwe with significant issues around food security and health care. In Jan 2015 Emma Leslie & Joy Tukahirwa conducted a scoping visit with ALFA (Abundant Life For All) to determine suitability of running a MTG in Gokwe. Peter Ronalds volunteered to head up a team to conduct training with farmers in Gokwe. The original intention was to run a series of small focused field days, however this expanded into a MTG. Peter headed up the team & was accompanied by his son Josh, Clinton Tepper and David Curry. Joy Tukahirwa (Uganda) also provided support). ALFA organised the logistics, participating farmers and government involvement.

Key Points:

Team leader: Peter Ronalds

Delivery Organisation: Beyond Subsistence

Main partners: ALFA, CIA tax, Zimbabwe Gov, AAF

Funding: CIA tax, individual donations, fundraisers

Dates: 4th - 8th July 2016

Location: Lotope Forest Lodge, Gokwe Sth, Zimbabwe

Participants: 58 (21female & 37male) + 5 trainers

Ratio: 36% female & 64% male

Soils: Kalahari Sands - up to 70m deep. Class 5 land (very erodible, low organic matter, low fertility)

Farming practices: Fruit trees, vegetables, maize, sorghum, ground nuts, chickens, goats, woodlot

The accommodation was at Lotope Forest Lodge which was 30km (1hour) south of Gokwe. All participants and trainers stayed at the lodge with simple African meals provided. All farms were located to the North and West of Gokwe & participants travelled on a large bus each day to the farm visits.



Course Summary

This was the first course run in Zimbabwe and the purpose of the course was to assist subsistence farmers to improve their livelihoods through an improved understanding of the benefits trees play in sustainable agriculture. All trainers and facilitators were farmers with experience and knowledge in tree based enterprises, sustainable agriculture and natural resource management. The course ran over 5 days and each day started at 8am with a devotion led by Sally (ALFA). Joy (BS) then conducted an evaluation of the previous day and one of the trainers conducted a brief recap of the previous day.

Each day the Australian trainers explored a new topic with a PowerPoint presentation, butcher's paper and participatory discussion. This was conducted at the forest lodge and took 1-1.5 hours with translators used to translate English into Shona. We all shared morning tea at the lodge and then travelled by bus to visit champion farmers, communities and schools who were trialling some of the practices being explored. Lunch was held in the field or villages and we generally returned to the lodge around 7pm (if we had no breakdowns)!

On the final evening there was a celebration dinner and the government administrator issued certificates to the participants. There was much dancing, celebration, music and skits. In addition, on the final night an interim c/tee was formed to establish an Agroforestry Network which will provide an opportunity for participating farmers to stay connected and support each other in the future.

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Run down of each days activities

Day 1: All participants introduced themselves & stated what they hoped to get out of the course. After formalities Lewis Radzire (forestry officer) & Livia Matarirano (former ICRAF) presented an overview of Gokwe soils, environment & historical background. The Australian team then introduced themselves and the MTG program. It was made clear that MTG doesn't promote specific tree species or reduce agricultural land through tree planting.

Farm Visits - There was 1 farm visit to Petros Mazvi's farm. Petros & his wife showcased; propagation of medicinal herbs and trees, apiary, making compost, fruit trees, eucalyptus woodlot and crops with planted fertiliser trees (*Faidherbia Albina*). Petros showed everyone the tippie tap which he invented. This is designed so people can wash their hands through standing on a little pedal which releases water, without polluting a tap handle. Participants were also very impressed with the teamwork and knowledge that Petros and his wife had of the plants they were growing. They also generously supplied lunch for us of sudza, covo and meat.



Some course participants



Above: Petros & his wife showing their herbs
Below: The tippie tap Petros invented

Day 2: Participants received their hats today which were very popular! The team presented on "Markets". This covered a range of topics such as; value adding, knowing what the market demands, producing quality product, knowing your costs etc.

Farm Visits - There were 3 visits. The first visit was to the Gokwe market where participants were divided into 3 groups and explored opportunities for plant based products. They visited several stalls and discussed; demand, supply, prices, species and quality of timber. After this we visited 2 farms. The first farm was John Hlabati who had multiple income streams including woodlot, apiary & cotton. There was fantastic discussion by the participants. The second farm we visited was Ophias Mangwiro's farm. Ophias had multiple income streams including mangos, bananas, tomatoes, papayas, maize, sugarcane, crops, fertiliser trees etc. Participants were super impressed with both farm visits. We were late back to lodge as bus broke down on the way home.



Below: Exploring opportunities at market



John showing his woodlot

Beehives



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Day 3: There were 2 presentations today. Tree measurement & trees for shelter and protection. Every farm is different, however, on all farms, trees add value in terms of shelter for crops and animals. It was explained that shelter is dependent on several factors such as tree height, location of trees, thickness, and distance between trees. Tree shelter has capacity to reduce wind speed whilst also producing products such as timber or fruit. Participants received their tape measures today.

Farm Visits - There were 2 farm visits. The first farm was Donald Munoti's farm. This was located in very sandy desert country. We drove as far as the bus could take us & then walked for many kms and came to an oasis in the desert (Donald's farm). The entrance was lined with eucalyptus trees and bougainvillea. Donald started by saying "I rake up every leave that falls of the trees and turn them into compost!" This set the scene for one of the most innovative farms we have seen in Africa. Donald told the farmers to "Buy a raincoat when it is raining and watch where the water is running. If the water is leaving your farm, you are losing soils and nutrients! I practice conservation agriculture all the time." Donald had dug trenches throughout his farm to collect water runoff and now had a beautiful oasis in the desert. He was growing papaya, bananas, mango, citrus. He was growing maize interspersed with fertiliser trees. He was growing chilli's and selling them to Nando's. We were very impressed with Donald's farm.

The second farm was Zion Church, and they were involved in large scale fruit and vegetable growing plus livestock farming. They were also making beehives and growing fish. They very kindly provided tea for us of Sudza, covo & meat. We left this farm at 8pm and unfortunately the bus broke down again, so we didnt get back to the lodge till 2:15am. It was a very long day!



The bus!



Above: Sandy soils near Donald's farm
Below: Donald's oasis



Drying chili's for Nando's



Above: Donald talking about conservation farming
Left: Measuring trees

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Run down of each days activities

Day 4: Today's presentation was focused on soils. A number of key soil issues relevant to Gokwe were covered such as; structure, fertility and erosion. Participants looked at several soil types and discussed the importance of building soil organic matter and keeping the soil covered at all times. The making and use of compost was also discussed.

Farm Visits - There were 3 farm visits. The first visit was Sasame Primary school which had a woodlot. Josh also participated in distributing donated soccer balls to the staff and students. The second visit was Kuwirrana Community Garden which was supported by ALFA to support those in extreme poverty such as widows and orphans. This was an impressive community initiative & there were many testimonies of how this garden had provided the poorest people in the community with dignity. The third visit was to Tete & Anna Tavengwa's farm. Tete participated in the Ntungamo MTG (July 2014) in Uganda. He has been sharing his knowledge in the community ever since & been putting everything he learned into practice. He has a high standing in the community and Africans kept saying that "Knowledge gained is not knowledge unless it is shared"! Most importantly Tete has been sharing his knowledge. Tete is a champion farmer involved in conservation agriculture and integrating trees such as citrus and faidherbia into his crops. In Mar 2016 he won the conservation farmer of the year in his region! Participants were most impressed with the partnership of Tete & Anna & their shared knowledge. It is worth noting the involvement of the Agritex officers who were assisting some of the champion farmers. Agritex officers are employed by the Zimbabwe Gov to assist farmers with agronomy, soil conservation and improved farming practices. Farmers also pay for this service. We were very impressed with the knowledge of the Agritex officers. A yummy lunch of Sudza, covo and meat was provided by the local village.



Sesame primary school



Kuwirrana community garden



Tete and Anna's Agritex extension officer who helps them implement conservation agriculture



Above: Tete with minimal tillage - keeping soil covered
Left: Natural tree guard

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Run down of each days activities

Day 5: Today's presentations focused on tree management and peer mentoring. Participants learnt how trees grow and were encouraged to look after their trees to get the most benefit out of them. Farmers were encouraged to seek each other out for support, to share knowledge and learn. Forming a structured group can assist with accountability and long term durability.

Farm Visits - We visited 2 farms today. The first farm was owned by Phineas Sena who had citrus, mango, bananas, apiary plus a wide range of crops including sugarcane, grapes, maize, pumpkins, vegetables etc. Every piece of soil was growing something. It was a highly productive farm that impressed participants.

The second visit was to Mandla Moyo's farm. Mandla was a young farmer who went to college and got an agricultural degree, but couldn't get a job, so decided to put his knowledge into practice on his parents farm. He was growing tomatoes, onions, bananas, chickens and fish. Participants were amazed by the yields he was getting and the prices he was receiving. He paid off a micro loan to sink a bore in 3 months and then built his parents a house!

Graduation - On Friday night at the completion of the course we shared a celebratory dinner and the Local Government Administrator presented the certificates. She also gave an inspirational speech thanking the organisers and farmers and encouraged everyone to push on & put in practice what they learned. A number of participants conducted a fantastic drama about tree conservation and there were many speeches. Joy presented on the achievements of the networks in Uganda and an interim c/tee was formed to establish the Gokwe Agroforestry Network. After formalities there was much dancing and celebration until late.



Phineas farm mango lined entrance



Citrus, mango, maize & sugarcane



Mandla's tomatoes
Banana nursery



Onions

Interim C/tee

Government official presenting certificates



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Official tree planting - The team from Australia & Zimconserve were invited to plant 2 ceremonial trees at Latope Forest Lodge on Saturday morning before we departed. Pictured are the team



Overview: I am incredibly grateful for the opportunity to lead this team from Beyond Subsistence to Gokwe, Zimbabwe. The team of Clinton, David, Josh & Joy worked together so well. The training was targeted and clear. The participants were a great mix of subsistence farmers, extension staff, Zimconserve and Gov officials. The feedback from participants was excellent. The champion farmers were so open to share their knowledge. The local villages were so hospitable. It is fair to say that Zimbabwe is facing extreme challenges and ALFA did an amazing job in pulling the course together. The trainers and participants lived together for the week. This worked well & wonderful friendships were formed. The cooks did an amazing job with the resources they had. We had many challenges. The bus broke down many times. Every other vehicle broke down. We ran out of water. Monkeys shorted out the electricity. There were curfews. We were stopped continually at police roadblocks. The roads were terrible. However, the people are resilient. They are friendly. Their faith was real. They appreciated everything we taught them. We probably learnt as much from them, as they learnt from us.

Thanks: To all those who supported this team through prayer, donations, time and support - our heartfelt thanks. We were on the frontline, but you played just a significant role.

- Thanks to CIA Tax for your financial support.
- Thanks to Beyond Subsistence for trusting us to deliver your vision
- Thanks to Warragul Regional College for supporting Josh & running the film night
- Thanks to Baw Baw Food Hub for running a movie night at Warragul Cinema
- Thanks to Sally Chademana from ALFA for organising an amazing course in spite of so many challenges!
- Thanks to the rest of the ALFA team - Simba, Agnes, Taurai, Sharon, Sithabiso, Bessie, Voice, Blessings
- Thanks to the farmers, schools, villages and communities who hosted us
- Thanks to the Zimbabwe Gov for their support with Forestry staff, Agritex staff & local gov support
- Thanks to the cooks who kept us well fed
- Thanks to the drivers
- Thanks to the forest guards who looked after us
- Thanks to Zimconserve whose presence added so much to the course
- Thanks to our families for their support & love
- Thanks to God for giving us the privilege and opportunity to use our gifts to help others in such a unique & meaningful way

