

# Rural Life: making a living on the land

Chaseyama Community Zimbabwe

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## Abstract

For the past few years, there has been a remarkable change of lifestyles for the people living in the Zimbabwean rural areas. The economic downfall which leads to the shutting down of many mass employing industries has contributed to the high unemployment rates. Incomes for those who were fortunate enough to survive the retrenchments were cut down by at least 30 to 50% making the life in the cities very difficult. With this, many people returned to their rural areas to start working on the land and this has become one of the major activities which most people are surviving from, despite various problems and difficulties found in depending solely on farming. In this article, we want to present the stories from the peasant farmers who are making a living on the soil in Chaseyama community Chimanimani Zimbabwe, looking how they are trying to make the ends meet.

**Key words:** Rural area, economic downfall, unemployment, peasant farmers, Chaseyama community.

## Introduction

The significant population of Zimbabwe is living in the rural areas and also farming is their major source of income, so to really understand life in the rural area one should understand the economy of the country as well. Zimbabwe was once well known as the bread basket of Africa. The country used to produce quite a lot of crops especially maize and tobacco which constitute a good percentage of the total incomes of the country. Zimbabwe used to be the top producer of tobacco; and in

2009, it was number 13 exporter of un-processed tobacco in the world. In some other regions, people used to grow sugar can, some tea and some were involved into horticulture production focusing on the flowers for export purposes. These agriculture activities differ with the climate of the region. But one more important thing to understand is that, Zimbabweans make a living through the utilisation of land. Peasant farming is now competing as the major support of the Zimbabwean economy. With this, we then come to a question which this document is looking at, would the people in the rural areas make a living through farming, and if so how exactly are they making it.

## **Rural life in Chaseyama**

For many people in Zimbabwe, rural areas are their homes were everyone who failed to copy with life in the city would just go back and start to live focusing on farming. Just like other rural communities in Zimbabwe, Chaseyama is one of the communities where people are living and surviving from the fruits of the land.

Hundreds of kilometres from the capital city of Zimbabwe, and one of the small communities of Chimanimani which borders with the Mozambican boarder, is a brief description of the location of Chaseyama. The community is located in climatic region five where rainfalls are very low with high daily temperatures. The soils are saline which makes farming maize the staple food of the country difficult as well making life hard for the first time visitors to the area because of the high temperatures and the type of water.

In general Chimanimani is well known as a timber producing District which constitutes its major economic activity. The timber industry has been facing a lot of downfalls forcing many people to leave work unpaid. The angry workers started burning the pine trees clearing land for farming as a way of compensating to their lost jobs and money. The District activities have slowly shifted from being purely a timber processing area to a farming zone.

As this is the case, Chaseyama community was well known as a place where farming was just a norm with less yields being captivated, but also an area which produce good honey and with potential for tourism. Many people were not entirely farmers but their surviving skills were based on quick money activities like honey production, illegal mining and cross boarder trading. But due to the banning of illegal mining, enforcements of imports laws, economic hardship and the punch provided by the agro-ecology groups in the community, 2015 witnessed the registration of new farmers who are now trying to make a living on the land.

Here we want to discuss about how farmers are making a living from land, looking at how they came into existence and how they are making it as farmers in such a dry spell area. Our discussion will be centred on Gift Hanyana a new millennium farmer and Judith Bingandadi the 90s farmer.

## Portraits of farmers in Chaseyama Community

### Gift Hanyana

#### Life before - visiting the rural areas

Despite being 42 years this year, Gift Hanyana still believes that in the African society, life begins at 40 and for him, life has just started. Gift Hanyana lives with his wife Felistus Hanyana who is currently employed at Marange Diamonds in Chiadzwa few kilometres from Chaseyama. The



two lived with their three children; two of them are at primary level and the last one is still nursed born this year 2017. Hanyana as one of the bread winners of the family, he lives with his siblings which includes his young brothers and his wife's young sisters. The two have managed to recently build their five roomed house with a thatched kitchen outside.

*“After completing my Secondary education at Chakowa, I moved to live in the city of Harare. During those days, life in the city was so good and despite my education level, I managed to secure a job in the city.”* Hanyana said this in an interview. The Zimbabwe of 1990s was a very good Zimbabwe where the completion of ordinary level was a guarantee that someone was going to easily find a job despite the level of education. Most of the people who were studying at the Universities, some of them finished their degrees whilst already employed.

In the year 2007, Hanyana got married and by then he was living with his parents. He lost his job some few years after he got married and for him, he was only left with an option to go back home. He stayed with his parents until 2011 and this is when he started to look for his own piece of land to live. *“For me, I just wanted a piece of land so that I will live with my family and avoid being depended on my parents. I sensed that I was becoming a burden to them, looking after my family and my young brothers and sisters. So moving was a good idea for me.”* Said Hanyana. On his new piece of land, he managed to build a two roomed house where the family were staying. By then he had no idea of what he was going to do next with his land.

Mr Hanyana gave a short account of the land which he was living, how he found the land and what was happening in his life by then;

*When I came to live in Chaseyama, I had no formal work and my wife was not employed by then. The unfortunate part of the land which I was allocated was that, it was full of stones as well as not fit for farming in many people’s eyes. Even though being the case, my main reason for coming back to the rural area was that I wanted to do something to survive and the only option was to do farming. So I sat down and begin to think of how best I was to deal with this land as someone who had never been into farming. It was only an ideology and a popular view in the African communities that life is in your land.*

After Gift and Felistus built their first buildings, some of the family members moved in together to live with them. His wife finally got work at Marange Diamonds fields and the family was now depending on the

money Felistus was getting from her salary and Gift by then was doing cross boarder trading going to do some piece jobs in Botswana, Mozambique and South Africa. So with the little money they earned, they extended their house and built a goat and chicken house because a family in the African sense is seen by having at least one type of domestic animal and this will give value to the status of the family.

### **The inspiration of becoming a farmer**

Hanyana was born a footballer, his dreams were of becoming a great footballer and this dream was shattered when he got injured and the doctor told him that, *Gift you can no longer play football, it seems as if you have a permanent injury. I didn't believe the doctor by then because I wanted to achieve my dream, though I later realised that I wasn't for sure going to be a footballer.* In the year 2016, July, Hanyana met Julious Piti the Director of PORET who invited him to attend a permaculture course which was to be held in August. And before the workshop, PORET organised a soccer tournament which was mainly focused on spreading the gospel of seed through sport and Hanyana participated. It was from that moment that Hanyana started to regularly visit PORET attending to their projects.

For Hanyana, it seems as if what he was looking for had now come into existence;

*It became clear to me that what I was looking for had come true. So I rushed direct to the Director of PORET who visited my place and helped me site some of the elements at my place. I have managed to dig a mini dam before PORET officials visited me and the moment they visited my dam together with John Nzira, they explained to me what I was doing and how I was supposed to make it up. I also learned about CPC and its members started to visit my place helping me. What clearly surprised me was that some of the people who I had never seen in the field farming were now members of the CPC constructing swales at their places. When I asked them what, they told me that it was a new age where farming was the immediate stroll. So I was then motivated to take this step.*

So his dream of becoming a farmer was slowly revived. He managed to make up his dam to standard, constructing some swales, drill a borehole, have nurseries, fenced his yard and garden together mobilising some of his friends and parents to practise agro-ecology.

Gift Hanyana developed a well-designed garden where he is planting different types of vegetables; he has tomatoes, potatoes, covo, sugarcane, bananas, some herbs around the garden and a whole lot of fruit trees. All these changes happened from August 2016 until now and he has gone a long way with farming. He can now sell vegetables to the nearby communities as well as selling tomatoes to the city people because tomatoes are on demand.



*Hanyana doing land preparation during the summer of 2016*



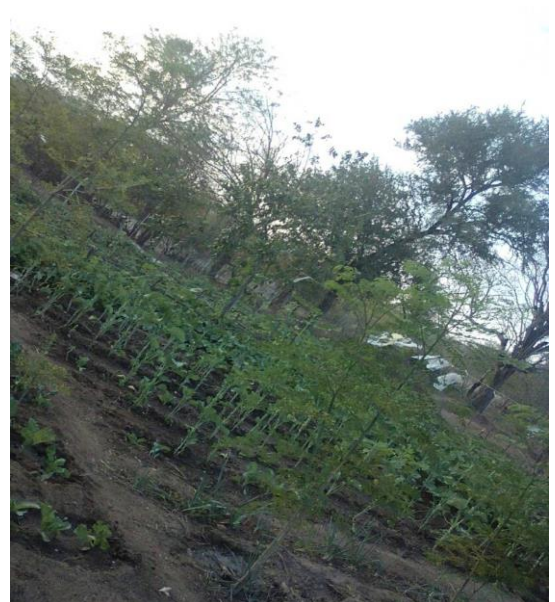
*Hanyana's mini dam under construction in 2016 and now loaded with water weeks after 2017 rains*

## **Experiencing a change**

Witnessed from Hanyana's achievements so far, it appears positive that he is a way forward in terms of living on the land. Hanyana said that though he is trying to copy with this new type of farming, he saw many things which need to be corrected in his farming expertise. His dam needs attention on how he is going to make it store water for a long time and what sort of a supporting project he would love to include. Besides being a farmer, he is also a part time soccer coach at Nhedziwa, and also has time to work with the kids and juniors who are part of his newly found and not registered soccer academy.

Hanyana did not become selfish when he received this information about sustainable farming by keeping it to his own. He introduced some nursery projects to the junior footballers and some of the youth through a PORET youth platform which was launched by Shadreck Masawi. This platform for youth has seen many young people eager to learn in their own circle about permaculture through the initiation of nursery

projects at their respective places. *My wish is to see these kids learning about permaculture because this is the only hope left for us people living in the rural areas. Especially in Chaseyama, you can't use fertilisers; you need water and many other things which need attention* Said Gift. As of now, Hanyana has started enjoying some of the benefits of farming; he has erected a garden where he is planting vegetables, harvesting water and conserving the soil. Also he has managed to drill a borehole where he wants to use the water for irrigation and also making it easy for the community to get water due the water situation in Chaseyama. He has also managed to build a ferro-cement water tank to harvest roof water tank. Now his family is now managing to eat from the garden and from the selling of the vegetables in the garden.



*Hanyana's Vegetable garden*

*Hanyanas nurseries at the beginning*

### **Outreach Programs as a way of community development**

CPC has been doing community projects through the farmer's action learning groups. Farmers were helping each other in basic projects together with developing some of the worst community sites. One of the farmers action learning groups which has been working quite well is from Hapare where farmers are reclaiming a gully using gabions and



constructing some swales. Recently PORET employed some personnel; Mr Dube who is working with individuals in the community helping farmers in the areas they are still lacking. Hanyana said that he has found this program good because this has given a platform for farmers to learn from experienced people and the regular visit by the outreach officer motivate the farmers to keep on farming.

As of now, Hanyana is doing projects with the help PORET and CPC where he has managed to build a ferro-cement water tank where other people in the community are coming to see and learn from it. He is also developing a nutritional garden for his family.

### **The loopholes**

*I can say that the level is still low compared to what is expected of us. We are good farmers but farming needs resources and a general lack of these resources from knowledge to other necessities is making some farmers to lag behind.,* shared Gift Hanyana. Hanyana believes in farming as an important aspect in the human life but farming doesn't just come and grow at once, it's a process which needs to be learned and understood. There are a lot of things which still need to be done in Chaseyama and if these things are done, living on the land will become a reality. The very fore most thing needed is for the community to have the same vision so that they will plan ahead together from the same point of view. There is a need for the community to adopt the sustainable methods of farming together with including the young generation into all the projects. *If this is done, we can say Chaseyama can be a resourceful model community where everyone would love to come and learn from.*

### **Chaseyama a dream home or a fly-by-night**

Asked of any thoughts of living Chaseyama, Hanyana said;

*I can openly say I don't have plans to move out from Chaseyama I have seen it in many communities that people are developing other peoples areas whilst theirs are lying idle. So for me, I want to achieve my dream of having a soccer academy and in*

*all the soccer activities we will be doing, I will be integrating it with sustainable farming so that our children understand the importance of farming.*

### **Life through farming- the future of Chaseyama community**

*It is nice working with CPC and PORET and I hope that if people have one vision and real understanding, we will achieve a common goal. Chaseyama is a land which has a potential to develop despite it having difficulties of good rainfalls. I have learnt that we can survive from our precious resource which is the land. There are a lot of potential projects which just needs cooperation and the future of Chaseyama is a community of excellence where other people will come to learn about sustainable farming, tourism witnessing the preservation of natural heritage as well as a community where talent is a priority.*

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### **Judith Bingadhadhi**

*As you can see right now, I am looking young and energetic though I am old enough with a son in law and grandchildren. This is all the work of harnessing the land which my husband left for the family. I embrace the saying that working makes someone young and looks healthy.* These were the opening words of Judith Bingadhadhi.



### **Testing a different soil**

Judith came to live in Chaseyama in the year 1998 with her husband and her Children some were old and some who were still young by then. There were many people who have come to live in that hot stricken area of Chaseyama under village head Makuneyi of Hapare Village. They were not the pioneer villagers to live underneath the Chayamiti Mountains. Rainfalls were low, summers were hot as well as the soil saline. So most of the people who were given land together with them, left the land and relocated to other places because the weather conditions were not that welcoming. They mostly survived from the

water from the nearby stream which only supplied water seasonally and this is where they put their gardens.

When they started to live on the area, they tried many crops with some coping and others dying so their stay was the first five years of studying the environment. They then realised that the area was suitable for small livestock production together with small grains and it was from this discovery that they started to manage the life in Chaseyama.

When asked of her first five years' experience with the soil type in Chaseyama she said;

*My experience with this type of soil in Chaseyama is adventures, the moment I understood that the soil was saline and without feeding. I then said to myself, this soil does not need fertilisers because if I add, I will be worsening it. So I choose small grains because they don't need fertilisers and I started to harvest a lot from them.*

Judith added that she was one of the luckiest people in Chaseyama because the land she was given was at least fertile than the surrounding areas. For her it was because her land was formerly occupied by a lot of trees and when she started tilling the land, she did not remove all of the trees but left some nitrogen fixing trees like Mahogany.

### **Furthering agro-ecology practises**

Judith was born a farmer and before she came from Vumba where she was staying with her family, she was doing organic farming. Even some of the seeds she is growing today in Chaseyama, they are native of Vumba. When she came to live in the area, Mr Nkomo and Mr Piti were already living at the place which is now the PORET centre. They were doing their projects as families but their projects were so interesting. They were planting sugarcane one of the plants which no one has ever planted in the area without adequate water, there were vegetables together with fruit trees. *I imagined the way they were doing their farming in Chaseyama, running up and down the Chayamiti mountains everyday joining their broken pipes, it was pathetic and that made me strong. I was ready to fight this dry spell too pronounced Judith.*

When TSURO came, which is a sister organisation to PORET, we joined the TSURO club working with it. Working with TSURO was good because we learnt some of the things about sustainable farming. It was in 2009 when the farmers in Chaseyama thought of having a club under PORET (the Piti family through the demand of the community registered PORET) where farmers would come and do their work together. Having this club was vital because PORET as a community based organisation working in the community which it understood its needs. So Judith also joined CPC as a club member in 2009 and they started working as a family. PORET started to look for funds so that the community ideologies would be developed.



Judith showcasing her products during a seed and food festival in Harare

### **Surviving from the land**

*My life in Chaseyama is a tale of a black African woman surviving solely from farming,* said Judith. *When I grew up, I was told that there is nothing good like a blessing of the land and even today, I tell my children that whatever you need should come from the land,* she added. Judith is currently living on her homestead with her three grandchildren and a son who has a son in ECD level going age. Her last born child is married in Chikukwa in Chimanimani. She is growing small grains such as sorghum, millet and also she has a lot of monkey beans in her granary. Judith has managed to send her

children to school up to form four using the money she acquired from NSSA as well as from farming. She says, *though I am a good farmer, rainfall patterns here are poor. We receive good rains at least once in every three to four years.*

One of the causes of the poor yield according to her is that, though the rainfalls are low, the major problem is on the knowledge of utilising the small rains which are received during the rainy season. She expressed her thankfulness to the program initiated by PORET; *I can simply say that, the course which we did at PORET, the Permaculture design together with the water harvesting were very helpful. I am now able to understand that it's not all about water which makes us become poor farmers; it's about the lack of knowledge to harvest water and sustainably use it.*

Judith confirmed that she is part of a farmer learning group where they are doing water management in the village. Though Mr Dube has now started to come for outreach programs, she said that they started working together long time ago and they have managed to do some remarkable projects together like water management as one of the viable project. So Judith is surviving through farming in the dry area of Chaseyama.

### **Challenges faced**

Judith expressed her deep concern about living as a peasant farmer;

*I understand that we should work as farmers utilising our land to earn a living. We have been farming since long back and we are still doing farming. One of the major problems which we are facing as farmers especially here in Chaseyama is the lack of knowledge to utilise the little resources we have. If we had known that we can harvest water from the roof tops, sometimes we were supposed to be huge by now but because we have no knowledge we are still poor farmers. Another thing which has been affecting us is that of the massive cutting down of trees here in the area. When we came to live in Hapare there were a lot of trees and most areas which were sacred, but now they are gone and the sacred places are no longer sacred and I think its high time we should preserve our heritage and culture and make our children understand what*

*is important to us because they are the ones messing around with trees. We have gullies, and the climate is changing due to these activities*

### **Chaseyama and the future**

*I can confirm that, Chaseyama is now my home and my children believe in it, remarked Judith. They have learned a lot and were able to copy with the weather conditions of the area. I have taught them to do farming and to look at the land as their own hope of survival looking at their status that they are not educated like others. She added. Judith believes in farming and she has been acquainted in sustainable agriculture and she wants to experiment everything in Chaseyama. She said that if you want to be accredited as a good farmer, you should survive the conditions in the area you live and if you run to other areas with good farming services, you are a failure because who do you expect to come and utilise the land you have left idle. She said she believes in Chaseyama as a best place where now food can be grown.*

### **Contributions to PORET and CPC**

Judith is one of the pioneer members of CPC and when PORET was formed she was part of the community which was engaged towards this initiation. As of now, Judith has volunteered to work for the ECD garden where they are developing an ECD garden for the children who learn at the PORET ECD centre. She has been also participating in the national events which were hosted in the capital city of Harare like the 2016 seed and food festival on behalf of PORET. Her hope is to see the Chaseyama community developing with the help of PORET and other relevant stakeholders. And for her, she is crying for the full participation of young people into agro ecology practises.

### **Conclusion**

Living as a farmer in the rural areas of Zimbabwe is not just easy in terms of surviving the demands of farming itself. Farmers have been receiving different teachings about farming which at the end makes them really forget exactly what they are supposed to follow and the end result is jeopardy of their projects. In the case of Chaseyama, farmers have come together and agreed on a common vision on what they want

to see happening in their area through a PORET organised strategic Direction. This paper is being developed by farmers themselves so that they will uniformly form one solid thought of how they are going to farm, where to get the seed, where to get the knowledge, and as well experimenting which projects can do well in their area. So rural life in Chaseyama is on a transition stage towards a well-developed Chaseyama society with a unique model of development