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SEED FAIRS PROMOTE FIGHT AGAINST FOOD INSECURITY

Every year, Chaseyama Permaculture Club (CPC) in collaboration with PORET, conducts village based Seed Fairs. A few of the farmers who participate in the village seed fairs are selected to represent their village at the Chimanimani District Seed Fair. This Seed Fair is attended by farmers who work with different organisations in the District. Apart from a way to celebrate local seeds in Chimanimani District, the Seed Fairs have proved to be a valuable tool to fight against food insecurity amongst vulnerable farmers.

During this year's Village Seed Fairs, farmers gathered at village centres to showcase the seeds they are producing at their households and to share them amongst themselves. This gave farmers access to different varieties of seeds.

Chaseyama Permaculture Club, the organiser of these Seed Fairs, prioritised free exchange of seeds among farmers and also to sell seeds amongst farmers at affordable prices. The idea is that that all farmers should be able to acquire seed to boost household food security. According to Mr Daniel Bande, the CPC Chairperson, Village Seed Fairs promote seed exchange amongst farmers ensuring that they have greater opportunity to grow a variety of seeds in their farming activities.

According to Chimimba Chibuwe a farmer from ward 5, "the Seed Fairs are important amongst farmers as they promote seed diversity and food diversity which means the reduction of food insecurity." She also said that if everyone has enough seed to plant, it means that more food will be harvested hence reducing risk of food shortage amongst farmers.

Farmers are urged to embrace these Village-based Seed Fairs as they provide an opportunity for them to share seeds amongst themselves either free of charge or at a lower cost compared to district seed fairs where prices are likely to be much higher.



Above: A number of seeds on display during a seed fair in Mubururu Village, Mr Kembo Homestead.

DIRECTORS MESSAGE

This year's Seed Fair program started on a high note. Farmers have really taken to the celebrations, as witnessed by their individual contribution towards making the Seed Fairs a reality. We were also pleased to see that youth have been actively involved in organising the events. This has shown that the gospel of sustainable farming is not only touching old people but also young people are receiving it. Youth involvement in such remarkable events gives us reassurance that our work to promote sustainable food production in Chimanimani will be passed from one generation to another. I thank all CPC members for participating in this year's Village Seed Fairs. *Julious Piti*

Editorial and Feedback: Shadreck Masawi
Cell: 0778 312 138

Email: shadreckmsw@gmail.com

Contributions: The stories were written by Youths who works with PORET

SEED FAIR AT MUTIDZAWANDA VILLAGE, WARD 3 CHAKOWA

Early in the morning on the 15TH of June, farmers gathered around at Agritex Offices in Chakowa to conduct their Seed Fair. Like other Seed Fairs that have been conducted this year by Chaseyama Permaculture Club, youths were at the centre of organising this event. This is one of the goals of CPC, to see active involvement of young people in agroecology.

The Seed Fair at Mutidzawanda Village was organised by Tadiwa Moyana, Joshua Musango and Vimbikai Chamhazhika. The youths helped in organising the event to make sure that the participants were provided with good space to display their seeds.

The Seed Fair was attended by 17 people which included the Village Head, Grace Gumba from PORET, Amai Mubako the Agritex extension officer presiding over judging the Seed Fair, youths and CPC members.

At ten o'clock in the morning, the program started with introductions and opening remarks led by Vimbikai Chamhazhika. She gave the history of CPC whilst Sibongile Mazike, a farmer, shared on the importance of seeds.

The message given by the Agritex Officer during the Seed Fair was that the CPC members from Mutidzawanda village should try to increase next year so that a number of people are food secured. The judge also commented that farmers still need to be trained on how to display their seeds and also to understand the importance of having such events at village level. It was a nice time for all the farmers. The Seed Fair ended with each farmer being given a present as a token of appreciation.

Below: One of the tables with seeds on display.



SEED FAIR AT NEMUTENZI VILLAGE, WARD 2 CHIBUWE



Above: seeds on display during the seed fair at Nemutenzi Village.

It's really warm in the morning on the 15th of June and the sun is promising to hit the area the whole day. Farmers from Nemutenzi village have already gathered at Mai Mazote Homestead to conduct a Seed Fair. The occasion is to be attended by Chaseyama Permaculture Club Members, Agritex Officer who is presiding over the event as the judge and friends who also wants to witness the event.

The event is just one of many events taking place across all areas which PORET works in. This event is going to be hosted by CPC members in preparation of the big event which is the District seed fair to be held at PORET the month of July.

All farmers are gathered around and the event is to start since the judge is already around. At ten o'clock, the programs starts with introductions and welcome remarks then followed by speeches. Farmers are called to visit the seed displays to see a number of seeds which are on display. The judge has already done with judging and it's now time to present the prices to each farmer.

All participating farmers are awarded with hoes, plates and cups as a way of appreciating their effort of participating in the fair. The key message is that seed fairs are important as they equip each farmer with knowledge of different seed varieties which are good for them.

YOUTH ORGANISED SEED FAIRS: TRANSFORMING THE MINDSET OF THE YOUNG



Above: Alisto Hanyana (in red and black Jacket) recording seeds on display during a seed fair in Nemutenzi Village.

We have been witnessing the active involvement of youth in Chasesyama in a number of agroecology activities. From Holistic Land and Livestock Management Programs, to site visits and embarking on various agroecology training courses, now we witness another exciting parade of youth, in the Seed Fairs.

In past years, Seed Fairs were considered to be done only by older people as they are recognised as the seed custodians. By virtue of being under their parents, the youth never found an opportunity to participate. However, through training programs at PORET, some of this year's village based Seed Fairs were organised by the youth as a way of involving them into seed work as well as preparing them to be seed custodians.

Youth helped to organise the events, giving them the experience they'll need to be seed custodians as well as equipping them with knowledge of various seed types and why it is important to grow them. It is also important for the young people to take part in such a way as this also give them a sense of belonging to CPC.

A number of Seed Fairs were conducted across all 5 areas where the Chasesyama Permaculture Club has its membership. It is the wish of the CPC, in partnership with PORET, to see young people equipped with knowledge of seeds because food security starts when just one is seed secured.

DIGGING DEEP INTO THE CULTURAL IMPORTANCE OF SEEDS

The picture below shows an important seed found in Chimanimani area. This type of seed is called *mukadzi usaende*, a sorghum variety which is mostly grown in the low veld areas where rainfall is low and farming seasons are short. The *mukadzi usaende* seed is mostly grown and loved by the local people as it is a seed which was traditionally grown by their predecessors. The reason being that if you grow it, within a short period of time, you will get your harvest and if your wife wants to divorce you because of hunger, she will not go because you would have managed to defeat hunger through this seed.

The knowledge about these seeds and their characters is acquired and understood through the Seed Fairs. Helping the farmers to dig deep into the cultural way of seed life and how it comes into place.

The cultural philosophy of these seeds is mainly derived from its characters and its roles performed. That is, we see in most seed fairs, how the cultural seeds are dominating because they are precious in our social and economic way of life.

According to Mr Kembo, the seeds they grow reflect their cultural way of life. It is because we only grow seeds which are native to us, the one which depict our cultural inheritance from our fore fathers, and thus we are going to pass the legacy to our children.

It is important to understand that Seed Fairs do not only provide platform for seed exchanges but they are there to educate people about our cultural way of life especially related to food production and how to respond in terms of food crisis and family crisis. This is well shown by the behaviour of *mukadzi usaende*, which is a unifier to save marriages. This information, and more, is shared during the Seed Fairs.



SEED FAIRS HELP FARMERS TO ACQUIRE DROUGHT RESISTANT SEEDS.

Each year, small holder farmers in rural areas or marginalised communities are faced with the issue of how to access quality seeds which suit their environment. In Zimbabwe, each area has a different climatic condition and soil type and this means that different seeds are needed for crop production.

The Government of Zimbabwe is working flat out to provide farming inputs to the rural farmers as a way of improving their household food security. As this is benefiting farmers, Seed Fairs have proved more efficient in the improvement of acquiring drought resistant crops especially among farmers in Chaseyama.

The village based Seeds Fairs are conducted by and between local farmers and the recommended seed are only those seeds which have been grown locally, selected properly and which can be recommended as the best seeds by the seed breeders and other experts in the field of farming.

Each seed breeder showcases a seed which he or she grows and which s/he is sure will do well in the dry areas of Chimanimani. According to Mrs Mubako, an Agritex officer from Ward 3, farmers are advised to display and exchange seed which they have confidence in. This gives farmers access to quality seeds, leading to greater food security in our community.

The approach being used by Chaseyama permaculture club is for farmers to exchange seeds among themselves. However there is need to incentivise these seed exchanges so that farmers will bring in quality seeds to the fairs and the exchanges will be done equally among farmers. Farmers also need income from these seeds hence giving them a token of appreciation means they are more likely to attend the fairs.

“The social and economic importance of quality seeds is a key contributor to food security. We saw it necessary to support these fairs by awarding participants with hoes and other tokens of appreciation,” says Mr Chamudondo, PORET Programs Manager.

This year’s Seed Fairs have been conducted in 5 wards which PORET works in. The purpose of these village based Seed Fairs is first to give every farmer an opportunity to participate. Secondly, to promote seed markets or market centres for seeds which are most suitable in each area. For example villages from areas like Chayamiti where there is high rainfall can exchange seeds of maize varieties amongst themselves because they do well in their region as compared to lower regions such as Hotsprings and Birchnough Bridge.

The village Seed Fairs are expected to improve farmers’ knowledge about the variety of seeds available to them, accessibility and knowledge on the history of the seed and the seed breeder. This will help farmers to adopt seeds that suit their environment and not only utilising seeds which are made available to them regardless of their suitability.

It is the recommendation that these village seed fairs should be done yearly and should be properly organised such that both CPC members and non-members should benefit. If all members have access to quality and reliable seeds, it means a rich community which is hunger free is created and no one is left behind.

Below: Sunflower seeds displayed during a Seed Fair. Sunflower is a drought resistant crops which is grown mostly for producing oil and stock feeds.

