

## Communities and Protected Areas: Demonstrating Sustainable Livelihoods Locally, Raising Awareness Globally

**SGP Grantee:** Chibememe Earth Healing Association

**Location:** Sangwe communal lands, southeastern Zimbabwe

**Ecosystem Type:** grasslands, savannas and woodlands; watershed

**Biodiversity Significance:** borders Great Limpopo Transfrontier Conservation Area; Global 200 EcoRegion 88 (Central and Eastern Miombo Woodlands)

**Key Themes:** sustainable harvesting and eco-agriculture techniques, participation of communities and indigenous groups in protected areas, raising awareness

**SGP Contribution:** \$32,338 (July 2000)

### Background

The Chibememe Earth Healing Association (CHIEHA), located in the Sangwe Communal Lands in Zimbabwe, brings together people from Shangani, Ndau and Karanga ethnic backgrounds. These very dry lands border the newly formed Great Limpopo Transfrontier Conservation Area, a 35,000 km<sup>2</sup> protected area that includes parts of Zimbabwe, South Africa, and Mozambique. These three countries signed a treaty in 2002 to formally create this park, and are working together to develop management plans. Once fully implemented, these plans should enable the free movement of animals throughout the park and increase tourism. Nearby communities hope that the new park can help improve their livelihoods as well.

### Project Implementation

CHIEHA was founded in August 1998, and was funded by the GEF Small Grants Programme in 2000. They own 220 acres of forest, which serve as a testing ground for many of their ecosystem restoration, crop introduction, and income generation projects. In addition to undertaking these efforts to restore local biodiversity, CHIEHA has also initiated major environmental and cultural awareness programs.

*Zivembava Island forest protection and watershed restoration:* The Sangwe lands border on the Save River, which is currently threatened by heavy siltation. To help prevent the land degradation that contributes to this, CHIEHA has established nurseries for indigenous plants and planted vertiva grass and indigenous species in the Zivembava forest. A new horticultural gardening project is also underway.

*Small Grains Project:* This effort has re-introduced a number of indigenous crops such as sorghum, millet, cowpeas, groundnuts and other drought tolerant crops. During good harvests, they have managed to produce enough for own consumption and for sale. More than 150 families are participating in this program.

*Kigelia Juice Project:* CHIEHA has also come up with new techniques for sustainable harvesting of non-timber forest products, which can be produced and sold. For example, 50 households sell kigelia juice, made from indigenous fruit trees. Marketing the juice was a challenge, but CHIEHA managed to connect with Gaia Garden, a Canadian natural products processing organization, which is now helping with this.

*CHIEHA Environmental and Cultural Center:* Another major activity supported by SGP was the construction of an environmental and cultural center, which is now complete except for furnishing. The center will gather and display information on indigenous knowledge and the culture of the Sangwe people. A website is also planned to share project activities and the natural products they are now making for sale.



*Environmental and cultural awareness programmes:* A special aspect of CHIEHA's work is its environmental and cultural outreach efforts, including bike rides and community theater. In October 2000, CHIEHA held a Millennium Environmental Awareness Bike Ride in Zimbabwe, which was a tremendous success. In 2003, CHIEHA organized a regional environmental ride to promote community involvement in the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Conservation Area (GLTFCA), and the group arrived in Durban for the World Parks Congress in August. Through these efforts, CHIEHA has raised awareness about issues affecting communities who live in and around parks, and to promote their involvement in the management of protected areas like the GLTFCA.

### **Results**

Thanks to the grains project, household crop output has doubled. In addition to improving local food security, community members have also begun to sell crop output. The benefits from the sale of crops and non-timber forest products are shared through extended families and communal resource sharing systems. CHIEHA estimates that over 50,000 people have been reached through their international bicycle rides and drama performances conducted since 1998. The new environmental and cultural center will further support awareness efforts.

### **Partnerships**

CHIEHA has collaborated with other local, national and international partners to carry out its activities. In addition to the GEF Small Grants Programme, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) supported CHIEHA's community bicycle ride from Zimbabwe to South Africa during the World Parks Congress. Their efforts have also received recognition through prizes. In 2002, the group received second prize in the Natural Resources Board's Zimflow Conservation Competition in Zimbabwe. In 2004, CHIEHA was named a finalist for the United Nations Development Programme's Equator Prize.