



CHIBEMEME EARTH HEALING ASSOCIATION (CHIEHA)

Zimbabwe



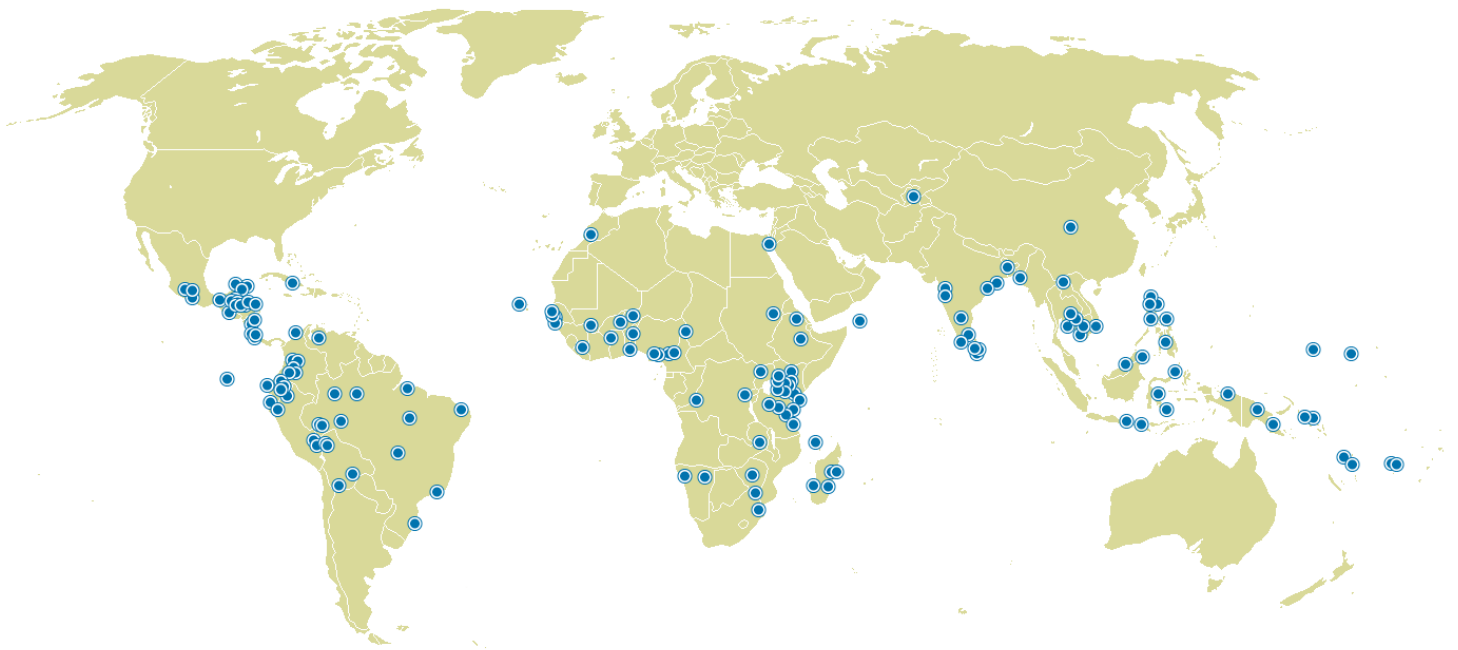
Equator Initiative Case Studies

Local sustainable development solutions for people, nature, and resilient communities

UNDP EQUATOR INITIATIVE CASE STUDY SERIES

Local and indigenous communities across the world are advancing innovative sustainable development solutions that work for people and for nature. Few publications or case studies tell the full story of how such initiatives evolve, the breadth of their impacts, or how they change over time. Fewer still have undertaken to tell these stories with community practitioners themselves guiding the narrative.

To mark its 10-year anniversary, the Equator Initiative aims to fill this gap. The following case study is one in a growing series that details the work of Equator Prize winners – vetted and peer-reviewed best practices in community-based environmental conservation and sustainable livelihoods. These cases are intended to inspire the policy dialogue needed to take local success to scale, to improve the global knowledge base on local environment and development solutions, and to serve as models for replication. Case studies are best viewed and understood with reference to '[The Power of Local Action: Lessons from 10 Years of the Equator Prize](#)', a compendium of lessons learned and policy guidance that draws from the case material.



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PROJECT SUMMARY

The Chibememe Earth Healing Association (CHIEHA) is a community-based initiative centered on the small village of Chibememe, in Masvingo province, Zimbabwe. Arising in response to habitat destruction and deforestation in the Zivambava Island forest and the Chibememe mainland forest, the organization's work has been driven by the 17 households that make up Chibememe community. Its work has spread to include neighbouring communities, however, with the development of environmental outreach and sustainable livelihoods activities that aim to sustainably manage natural resources in the wider Sangwe area and the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park Conservation Area.

Key activities have included innovative efforts to raise awareness on conservation through the initiative's Environment and Cultural Information Centre, as well as the processing of non-timber forest products, and promotion of eco- and ethno-tourism to capitalize on the area's rich natural and cultural heritage.

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KEY FACTS

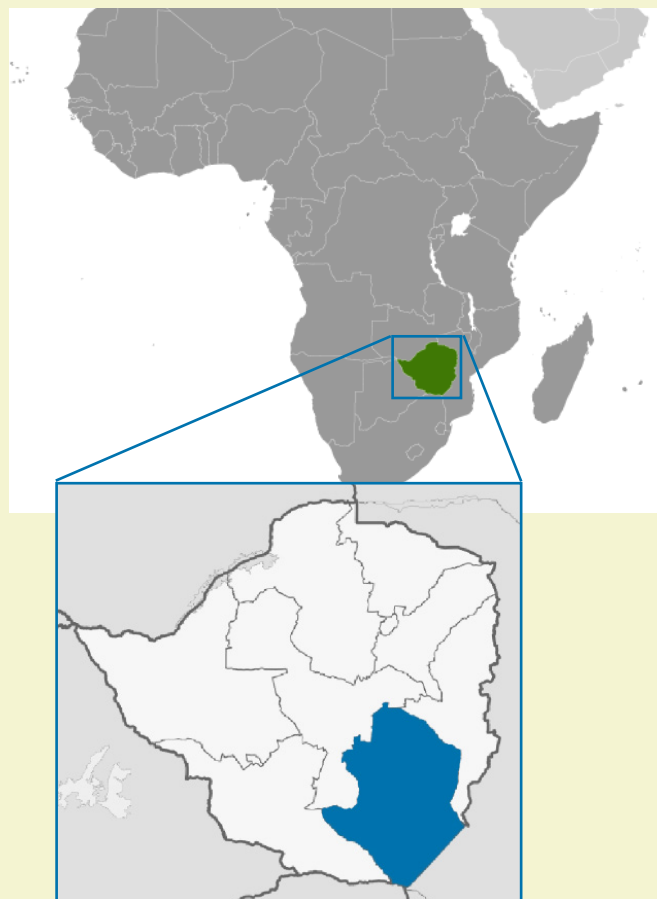
EQUATOR PRIZE WINNER: 2004

FOUNDED: 1998

LOCATION: Masvingo province, Zimbabwe

BENEFICIARIES: Communities in the South Eastern Lowveld

BIODIVERSITY: Riverine and savannah ecosystems



Background and Context



Chibememe Earth Healing Association (CHIEHA) is a community-based conservation and development organization established in 1998 in rural South Eastern Chiredzi, Masvingo province in Zimbabwe. The organization aims to promote the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in the Sangwe Communal Lands and the equitable sharing of benefits for the local population.

Environmental and socioeconomic threats in the lowveld

Masvingo Province is located in south-eastern Zimbabwe, bordering Mozambique on its eastern border and the provinces of Matabeleland South, Midlands, and Manicaland. In the province of 56,566 km², the population of approximately 1.3 million is dominated by the Karanga people. The province is located in the 'lowveld' of the country, where rainfall is infrequent and uncertain. A large part of the southern part of the province is prone to drought, meaning the ecosystems are predominantly dryland.

The poverty and environment challenges which catalyzed the creation of CHIEHA are common to rural Zimbabwe. Much of the population is engaged in environmentally and economically unsustainable activities, including the harvesting and sale of fodder and firewood, commercial brick molding, and wildlife poaching. The region has also experienced extensive environmental decline in the form of habitat destruction, deforestation (notably in the Zivambava Island forest and the Chibememe mainland forest), land degradation and erosion, and deteriorating numbers in flagship species due to poaching. Importantly, the initiative was also formed in response to a cultural challenge – the steady loss and decline of indigenous knowledge systems, oral history and traditional norms, all of which unpin sustainable land use strategies.

A community-based initiative; partnership model

Operating in the cultivated and forested semi-arid savanna ecosystem, CHIEHA works to foster a spirit of communal participation in the

conservation of its cultural and natural resources. The organization encouraged the equal involvement of men, women and youth in its decision-making and programming and has established networks to share information amongst a range of relevant stakeholders (most importantly, the local population) about environmental conservation, local culture, and sustainable development strategies and activities. CHIEHA employs a participatory approach to its management and programming, working on an ongoing basis to strengthen and build the capacity of local residents to participate in development and conservation decisions.

Women and youth groups were key players in the establishment of CHIEHA, as two groups squarely at the forefront of the socioeconomic and environmental challenges at the village level. Traditional leadership has been equally essential in the success of the initiative, particularly in the conservation and revitalization of indigenous knowledge systems. The initiative has also developed critical partnerships and relationships with government (relevant line ministries and departments, such as the Ministry of Environment and Tourism), multilateral and bilateral development agencies (UNDP, Canadian International Development Agency), and environmental and development NGOs (Malilangwe and Save Valley Conservancy, SAFIRE, and Assistance for Underprivileged Rural People).

The most active participants in CHIEHA's work, as well as the primary project beneficiaries, are the 17 households that make up Chibememe village. Benefits extend well beyond this group, however, to network members that include the adjoining villages of Sangwe, Ndowoyo, Matema and Musikavanhu Communal Lands. Engagement of neighboring villages and the extension of project benefits has occurred through: i) replication of the CHIEHA organizational model, and support in the formation of community-based collective action organizations (examples include the Mazivandagara project in Manjira village and the Kushinga Gully Reclamation project); extension of the CHIEHA coordinator and two field assistants to work with interested communities in other villages;

engagement in environmental and cultural awareness-raising activities, meetings and workshops held at the CHIEHA Information Centre; and support in resource mobilization and securing funds for the implementation of village conservation activities. Outreach to local communities is also done through partnership development; making connections between community and villages needs and the capacities of network partners (including CBOs, line ministries, and others).

Sustainable natural resource management

One of CHIEHA's primary objectives is the sustainable management and use of natural resources in the Sangwe area and the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park Conservation Area (GLTPCA). The GLTPCA is a young network, still in its development stage, but which aims to link and integrate the efforts of local, community-based organizations active in sustainable development. Groups involved in the network are diverse, and include traditional leadership organizations, catchment management programs, and wildlife protection committees. While the majority of current members are from Zimbabwe, the long-term objective of the network is to attract members across the borders of Mozambique and South Africa. Many community members are related culturally, share a common language, and draw from the same common pool resources – water, wildlife and forests. CHIEHA has been a pivotal advocate in the development and coordination of the network, and has used it effectively as a knowledge sharing platform in which communities can share experiences and lessons learned, market their products, and foment partnerships.

Tourism based on local natural and cultural heritage

CHIEHA also promotes eco- and ethno-tourism as a means of conserving local biodiversity and preserving cultural heritage. The ecotourism initiatives of CHIEHA are based on the natural and cultural resources of the Sangwe area. The region has a great deal to recommend it for tourism, including Zivambava Island, the Ndongo Ruins, the Chibememe mainland forest, and an abundance of local technology, art, song and dance. While current levels of tourism in the southeast region of Zimbabwe are quite low, CHIEHA's eco-tourism programs have the potential to become the engine of growth. CHIEHA is located in close proximity to two key wildlife sanctuaries, which are critical corridors of the GLTPCA – the 500,000 km Gonarezhou National Park (the second largest national park in Zimbabwe) and the 350,000 km Save Valley Conservancy (the largest privately owned wildlife sanctuary in Africa). These wildlife

havens have a great deal of potential to support CHIEHA tourism initiatives and to attract low-impact tourism. So too, the Chibememe community and the communities of the Sangwe communal lands have a diverse and rich cultural heritage, which can be the basis of ethno-tourism projects.

Other crosscutting objectives of CHIEHA include: the restoration and revival of the cultures and traditions of the Sangwe and surrounding communities for future generations; the fostering of a spirit of participation in the preservation and conservation of the region's natural and cultural heritage; raising the standard of living of members through livelihoods diversification; empowering local participation and engagement in policy-making processes; and the effective integration of natural resource conservation, traditional knowledge and land management systems, and sustainable development planning.

Organizational structure

CHIEHA is governed by a number of administrative committees. As a registered community conservation trust, the organization is overseen by a Board of Trustees comprised of traditional leaders, local community members, local authorities, and representatives of women's groups, line ministries, local NGOs and local schools. The Board of Trustees is nominated by the local population and retain responsibility for strategic guidance, policy development and assistance in resource mobilization and fundraising. An Executive Committee comprised of elected members of the local community is responsible for the day-to-day management of CHIEHA, as well as oversight of activities and programs in concert with CHIEHA's Coordinator. The major projects of CHIEHA are also overseen by sub-committees, which work cooperatively with the Coordinator and report to the Executive Committee. Example of sub-committees include: Earth Healing and Catchment Management, Environmental and Cultural Information and Energy Project, Nutritional Garden, Sustainable Agriculture, Zivemava Island Forest Conservation, and IncomeGeneration. Committees emerge and disassemble organically, based on project cycles and on what projects are operational at any given time. Coordination of the committees is often done on a voluntary or part-time basis. Committees are open to any member of the community. Committee members retain responsibility for organizing and coordinating all the activities associated with the respective projects. All seven Executive Committee members are from the Chibememe community, comprised of four women and three men. Eight of the twelve members of the CHIEHA Conservation and Development Trust board of trustees are from the community.

“Climate change is a reality for all of us. Local communities are the custodians of forest resources which are the world’s major carbon sinks – it is therefore the responsibility of all stakeholders to respect their voices in climate change negotiations.”

Gladman Chibememe, CHIEHA

Key Activities and Innovations



One of CHIEHA's key innovations has been the establishment of the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park Conservation Area Community Network, which oversees co-management of a wildlife area, lobbies for policies and laws that are friendly to rural farmers, promotes the inclusion of community rights, and petitions government for community benefits from biodiversity and sustainable use efforts in and around Zimbabwe's protected areas. CHIEHA has also focused its activities on income generation and food security, and established a community-based non-timber forest product processing centre, several ethno- and eco-tourism projects, and a sustainable agriculture project. With regards to the latter, efforts have been made to rehabilitate and protect degraded lands, employ a catchment management approach, undertake resource monitoring, reduce soil erosion and reclaim gullies.

Culturally-appropriate environmental education

A crosscutting activity for CHIEHA is environmental awareness-raising with surrounding communities. The organization operates an Environment and Cultural Information Centre that serves as a nucleus for heritage festivals, outreach, the restoration of local cultural sites, and the organization of environmental bicycle rides. As one specific example of environmental awareness activities, CHIEHA organizes drama performances such as the Jengeta Zviwanikwa Reva Sangwe (Conservation Ethics of the Sangwe People), which are targeted to national conferences, schools and cultural functions. The performances, which are often combined with traditional dances, regularly communicate the need to conserve and sustainably use biodiversity. (One student involved in this performance company has gone on to receive a degree in Theatre Arts and Drama from the local university).

Critically, CHIEHA's innovation has been in the reintroduction and conservation of indigenous knowledge, as well as its application in addressing human-wildlife conflict, local capacity to manage natural resources, partnership building and network development,

and livelihood alternatives. Traditional knowledge systems are used in the conservation of agricultural biodiversity, forests, and wildlife resources in Sangwe. By building on local knowledge, culture, capacity, and institutions, CHIEHA has been able to fuse traditional and modern conservation ethics.



Impacts



BIODIVERSITY IMPACTS

CHIEHA conservation and sustainable use activities have concentrated on the Zivambava Island Forest and Chibememe Mainland Forest, a combination of diverse riverine and savanna vegetation ecosystems. In Zivambava Island Forest alone, CHIEHA has been responsible for a doubling of the forest cover, with more than 200 hectares now protected. A further 120 hectares of forest surrounding Chibememe village have been conserved and used sustainably by the local population. The area is used for livestock rearing and the collection of non-timber forest products. The forests contain a high density of unique grass, trees, shrub and aloe species; several threatened animal species, including monkeys, pythons (three breeding sites with more than twelve snakes per site have been identified by community members), and elephants; a diverse assortment of bird species, including doves, honeycobs, qualias, eagles, and parrots; and populations of smaller mammals such as porcupines and anti bears.

Human-wildlife conflict has been a priority for CHIEHA, as the farmers of Chibememe village and the Sangwe communal land come into regular contact with monkeys, wild pigs and elephants which can cause significant damage to agricultural projects and crop lands. Small game come from local forests and wood lots, while bigger game (e.g. elephants) comes from adjacent conservancies, national parks and private farms. CHIEHA has worked with the local population to employ a number of traditional land management techniques to mitigate human-wildlife conflict, notably growing crops on the boundaries of farms and fields that include sorghum, rapoko and cotton, which tend to repel these animals, and which serve as a natural buffer to facilitate co-habitation.

CHIEHA does monitoring and evaluation of wildlife populations and natural resources through a participatory approach of local sampling. The group monitors the collection of firewood, timber, wild fruit and river sand, using community reporting. The same

approach is employed for monitoring forest and grass cover and wildlife populations. Community members undertake sample counts, with a standard template which indicated the abundance, stability and depletion of known species in the area. Field guides monitor a range of species and combine this with feedback from the community – a combination of personal patrols and community reports. For larger game and wildlife, community monitors check for footprints and record different sounds.

Additionally, CHIEHA is currently in the process of negotiating the possible co-management of a 10,000-hectare local wildlife area. There are positive signs that a Wildlife Land Reform Policy offers a window of opportunity for CHIEHA to leverage the success of the GLTPCA network and achieve success in its bid

SOCIOECONOMIC IMPACTS

CHIEHA has clearly defined socioeconomic goals which include: raising the standard of living of group members by expanding sustainable livelihood options; restoring and reclaiming lost culture and traditions of the Sangwe; enhancing the participation of women and youth in conservation efforts; and strengthening the capacity of Sangwe residents to manage natural resources. The primary project beneficiaries are communities in the South Eastern Lowveld of Zimbabwe. The project's target population is more than 150,000 people, 65 percent of whom are women, all of whom live in rural areas, and over 80 percent of whom live below the national poverty line.

The axes of CHIEHA's work in sustainable livelihoods are the Non-Timber Forest Products Processing Centre and the multipurpose CHIEHA Environmental and Cultural Information Centre. The former is still under development, but currently processes a modest number of agro-biodiversity products, including peanut butter, *Kigelia Africana* juice, and essential oils. The CHIEHA Environmental and Cultural Information Centre is the locus of awareness raising,

environment and sustainable development workshops and meetings, information for eco- and ethno-tourism services, coordination of the GLTPCA and other community knowledge sharing networks, and participatory research initiatives (on both local culture and biodiversity). CHIEHA has ambitions to develop the centre into a robust training facility for community-based natural resource management practitioners in the GLTPCA.

Land tenure is at the heart of CHIEHA's work, and tenure security enables community-based land management and a diversification of income generation strategies. The target population of CHIEHA's work lives on communal lands. The rural or district council, the most localized government administrative unit, owns the land on behalf of the state and the community. It is responsible for land administration, including the allocation of state land for commercial or business purposes, community ownership, etc. At the same time, traditional authorities such as village heads, sub-chiefs, and chiefs own and administer the land on which their people reside. In this system, traditional leaders allocate land to family units of the community, as well as individual private land in the form of agricultural fields and homesteads. Traditional leaders are responsible for the administration of common property land and access to common pool resources such as grazing land, water and sacred sites. Under these two systems of land governance, CHIEHA

has been allocated both the Zivembava Island Forest and the Chibememe Mainland Forest for both conservation and sustainable natural resource management. A traditional council resolution has mandated the community to manage local resources and protect local biodiversity. At the same time, much of the land surrounding the Sangwe communal lands is protected area land, including the Gonarezhou National Park, which is classified as state land, and the Save Valley Conservancy, which is Africa's largest privately owned wildlife sanctuary.

Traditional knowledge is essential in the operation of CHIEHA programs, particularly in the areas of farming and health. Since the Sangwe and Chibememe area is drought prone, traditional drought-tolerant crops such as sorghum, rapoko and sesame are grown. Traditional crop management systems including multi-cropping, water harvesting and agro-forestry are commonly practiced. Customary sustainable use is also commonly practiced in the mainland forests in the collection of fruits, edible caterpillars and insects, bull frogs, honey, and fish.

Since the project started, average household incomes have increased by 20 percent. Through CHIEHA's work, three full time jobs have been created, along with more than eight part-time positions. CHIEHA has supported community members to diversify their livelihoods,





including in sustainable agriculture, household gardening, ethno- and eco-tourism, and agro-processing.

POLICY IMPACTS

CHIEHA has been actively involved since its inception in policy development processes, working with different leadership structures in various villages, wards and districts to ensure that the interests of the local population living on communal lands are incorporated into policy development processes. In particular, CHIEHA has used ward councilors as an entry point for the direct participation of local community representatives in decision-making processes.

Notably, CHIEHA was instrumental in providing inputs into the National Environment Policy and Strategies in 2009-2010, which included important provisions on community conserved areas, conservancies, community partnerships, co-management arrangements for protected areas, prior informed consent, and

sustainable agriculture. CHIEHA was equally active in shaping the Wildlife-Based Land Reform Policy, ensuring that the policy consider the essential role of local communities as partners in wildlife management initiatives, and the inclusion of indigenous investors as part of wildlife-based ecotourism ventures. Moreover, CHIEHA was involved in lobbying for the inclusion of environmental and local community rights in Zimbabwe's Constitutional Reform Process. Contributions included recognition of the special relationship (and related rights) of indigenous peoples in the conservation and maintenance of the country's cultural and natural heritage, as well as provisions on ownership rights over local natural resources, access and benefit sharing, environmental health and local wellbeing, and traditional property rights.

CHIEHA has also been active in providing policy inputs at the regional level, participating in a number of African and SADC regional biodiversity policy processes on access and benefit sharing (ABS).

“Local community involvement in the CBD process has been limited over the years. If there is one thing you can do for local communities, it is to walk the talk and begin to take on board the interests of local communities in a clear, concrete and practical way—they are key partners in addressing the challenges of biodiversity loss and climate change.”

Gladman Chibememe, CHIEHA

Sustainability and Replication



SUSTAINABILITY

CHIEHA has attained institutional sustainability through the adoption of a “cluster and network” approach and lobbying efforts to create an enabling environment for local communities to manage their natural resource and participate directly in the policymaking processes. The “cluster and network” approach involves mobilization of community-based organizations that share an ecological region, ecosystems, or catchment area to work together in addressing common conservation and development challenges. Cluster members share joint capacity building and training programs, and often coordinate resource mobilization efforts. CHIEHA has been using this approach for knowledge sharing and joint efforts among seven community-based organizations on Zimbabwe side of the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park Conservation Area. CHIEHA has used this platform to encourage other communities to form community-based organization, which ultimately have joined the network.

Also key to the project’s sustainability and resonance with the local population has been the use of traditional and indigenous knowledge systems, direct community ownership and participation in decision-making, and a holistic approach to conservation, livelihoods and community health and wellbeing. In addition, CHIEHA has leveraged strategic partnerships and networks to achieve substantial results with relatively modest resources. Tenure security has been equally essential as the foundation on which to build community-based natural resource management strategies, and CHIEHA’s position as a legally incorporated community-based organization has bolstered its efforts with legitimacy.

REPLICATION

CHIEHA has been successful at sharing lessons on both their successes and challenges with other communities. This has been accomplished primarily through the CHIEHA Environmental and Cultural Information Centre as well as the Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park Conservation Area Community Network, but also through networks such as the ABS Capacity Building for Africa and the International Indigenous Forum on Biodiversity (IIFB). Local and regional media has also been used to reach target communities and other stakeholders, as well as community bicycle rides, drama performances and heritage festivals. CHIEHA views peer-to-peer knowledge exchange as a powerful way of sharing information and enabling local communities to speak directly to one another about the challenges that confront them. It has been their experience that local communities learn and connect more with initiatives that have faced common problems of bottom-up conservation and development solutions.

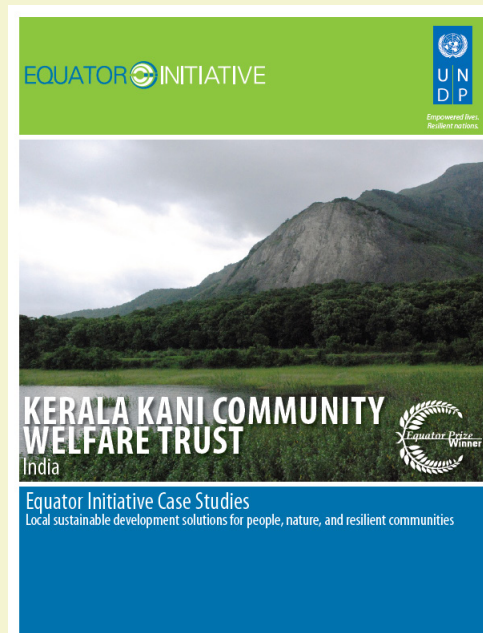
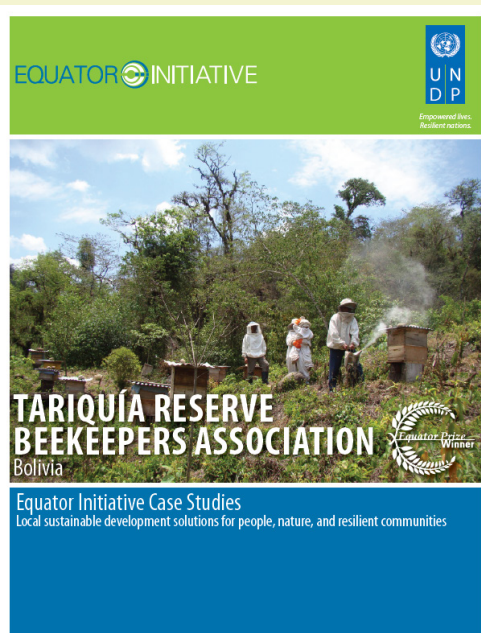
PARTNERS

CHIEHA depends on their diverse partnership model. For example, the Zimbabwe Environment Lawyers Association helped CHIEHA incorporate as a legally registered community-based organization and often provides policy guidance, as was done on the constitutional reform process. Partners such as the Africa 2000 Network Foundation Zimbabwe have helped with capacity building and network development. The UNDP GEF-Small Grants Programme has provided essential financial support, while various national line ministries (e.g. the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources Management) have provided policy guidance.

FURTHER REFERENCE

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