



Outstanding Practice in  
AGROECOLOGY 2019



## FACTSHEET

# Zimbabwe – Africa Centre for Holistic Management (2005)

### IN BRIEF

The Africa Centre for Holistic Management (ACHM), founded 1992 by the Savory Institute, supports the dissemination of holistic management planned grazing in Africa, foremost in Zimbabwe. This planning process addresses the problem of land desertification using well managed livestock to restore land and water sources. Based on a 3,200ha ranch called Dingamgonbe, ACHM works with local farmer communities, government agencies and NGO to offer innovative training and outreach programmes based on practical learning sites that provide evidence of land water and wildlife restoration using livestock. They state to have reached 15,000 communal farmers in 16 partner communities as well as having trained 200 facilitators from 80 organisations. Together with partners they promote sustainable grazing techniques on 500,000 hectares of land. As it only uses farmers own livestock, this practice is very transferable and is being adapted by other organizations in other regions.

### ABOUT THE PRACTICE AT A GLANCE

**Organisation:** African Centre for Holistic Management (NGO)

**Implemented in:** Hwange, Matabeleland North (Zimbabwe)

**Year:** 2005

**Beneficiaries:** Farmers with both livestock and not

**Topic(s):** Africa, Zimbabwe, production, livestock

## PROBLEMS TARGETED / CONTEXT

The practice addresses land degradation (desertification), biodiversity loss, food security, poverty eradication and climate change. In arid and semi-arid areas with damaged soils (i.e. desertification), most of the water that falls during the rainy season evaporates during the day. In addition, damaged soils release carbon, contributing to climate change. However, desertification does not only affect arid and semi-arid areas. The phenomenon is also affecting grassland areas with high rain falls like Zimbabwe. According to an independent Zimbabwean conservationist, Zimbabwe will be converted into a desert in just 35 years if pragmatic solutions are not implemented urgently. Desertification also produces a vicious circle of biodiversity loss, food insecurity and poverty. Researchers (incl. Allan Savory) have found that using livestock is an option to restore land in desertification areas. By mimicking the nature and movement of animal herds, researchers found that the soil was regenerating and biodiversity was increasing. Therefore, the practice is planning the grazing of livestock to mimic nature.

Holistic management planned grazing has been implemented in the 3,200 ha Dimbongombe Ranch since 1992. The main stakeholders involved in its development include the District Rural Council, local government, Traditional Chiefs in Hwange District, Village Heads, Headmen, Farmers, and Government Extension staff. In 2005, ACHM began working directly with local communal farmers. In 2010, the centre won the Buckminster Fuller Challenge (USA), a prize supporting development initiatives that have a significant potential to solve humanity's most pressing problems. Following receipt of a multi-million dollar grant from the US Agency for International Development, ACHM began working with NGOs in 2010 to develop training programmes and curriculum, in partnership with the Savory Institute for Holistic Land and Livestock Management community facilitators. In 2014 ACHM won the Humanitarian Water & Food Award (Denmark) as a leading edge innovator in food security.

## KEY FEATURES OF THE SOLUTION

ACHM's main goal is to empower communities to improve their lives and the lives of future generations by restoring land and natural water sources. It pursues a wide range of ecological, social and economic objectives, including to decrease the percentage of bare ground and increase the amount of soil-covering litter, to improve the effectiveness of water retention, to improve cropland soils and productivity using animal impact and conservation agriculture practices, to enhance community leadership, management and organizing capacity, to deepen community understanding of ecological literacy, to ensure agreements are in place regarding management of grazing and herding, to train herding teams in how to implement a grazing plan using low-stress herding and handling techniques, to ensure large livestock herds can be watered adequately and protected at night from predators and thieves, to maximize the amount of forage grown during the growing season by planning the grazing, to ensure forage lasts through the end of the non-growing season by planning the grazing, and to double crop yields on animal-treated croplands.

Concerning implementation, ACHM developed a detailed community curriculum on Holistic Land and Livestock Management. Firstly, farmers, community leaders and NGOs

are trained in the ACHM on holistic management planned grazing and are encouraged to develop the practice. This includes techniques on how to plan grazing and manage soil, water and animals using only what is locally available to them, and to increase land productivity. They also run a 2-day training programme for community leaders on the principles of holistic management and their implementation, and a marketing seminar.

Then, farmers implement the holistic planned grazing on their land. Managers subdivide their land into grazing divisions (i.e. pastures, paddocks) to gain control over livestock movements. The divisions are first planned on a map and then on the ground demarcated by fences, natural barriers or for herders by blazed trees or natural features. In creating their grazing plans, livestock managers decide how long the animals will stay together in one place, where they will move next, and when they will come back. This technique restores land and water sources, increases crop productivity and contributes to the production of meat and milk. Therefore, food security is improved in the practicing communities. Starting in 2 communities, ACHM now reaches 16 communities and plans to cover the 102 communities of the district within the coming years. Whilst the trainings used to be free, this was found to be problematic as many did not implement it, however now that a fee is incurred, it is more valued and well implemented. A price mechanism in which farmers pay with their products enables all to participate.

The practice is implemented by the Africa Centre for Holistic Management and a hub of 7 other institutes, such as TSURO and CELUCT (Zimbabwe), Njovu Trust (Zambia). Furthermore, the practice is being adapted by other organizations in other regions of Zimbabwe, Kenya, Botswana and Namibia. There is no financial support from the government available, however they have often worked together with ministries of agriculture, youth and the environment, and partnerships have developed therefrom. Local authorities and district councils also play a role in “making things move” and have also integrated the technique into some of their planning.

## **INNOVATIVE ASPECTS**

- Holistic management planned grazing is unique as it uses well managed livestock to restore land and water resources.
- It involves all target groups in the community i.e. men, women and youth.
- Is implemented in an inclusive manner: Communities decide on their own community action cycle.
- Is a low cost, sustainable, scalable, culturally appropriate innovation and makes money for the communities/farmers.

## **FACTS & FIGURES**

- The effectiveness of Holistic Management in boosting land fertility, water capture, animal welfare, biodiversity and lowering carbon emissions has been confirmed by multiple scientific studies.

- By 2015, under the Holistic Land and Livestock Management Community Facilitator Training Programme, the ACHM had trained 100 facilitators from Zimbabwe, Botswana, Zambia, South Africa, Namibia, Madagascar, Burkina Faso, Niger and Somalia. In total, people from over 20 countries. According to the nomination, by today, 200 trainers from 80 organization have been trained.
- ACHM has reached 15,000 communal farmers across 16 Zimbabwean partner communities.
- ACHM is implementing holistic grazing on 10,000 acres; with all partners together they are influencing more 500,000 hectares.
- Globally, the Savory Institute to which the ACHM belongs, has trained 10,000 people in Holistic Management and the practice is now associated with over 40 million acres.

### **OUTCOME, IMPACT & EFFECTIVENESS**

- A study conducted between 2001-2009 on Dimbangombe Ranch found a 31% decrease in bare ground and 56% increase in litter cover – meaning less surface loss of rainfall and surface evaporation.
- The same study found a 12% increase in perennial grass plants, which serves as reserve forage for sparse dry seasons.
- Compared with areas where animals roam uncontrolled, there is 3.7 times more forage on average on ACHM land.
- Farmers increased their revenues by 3-5 times in the 16 targeted communities in Zimbabwe, and now sell at local markets.
- Improved food security in the Hwange District; increased sustainable forage and livestock production, even in drought years; improved social cohesion; rivers and wetlands restored through holistic planned grazing in the practicing communities of Hwange district; restored soil cover and better water infiltration as well as increased biodiversity.

### **OUTLOOK, TRANSFERABILITY, SCALABILITY & COST-EFFICIENCY**

ACHM currently reaches 16 communities and plans to cover 102 communities of the district within the coming years. Furthermore, the practice is being adapted by other organizations in other regions, e.g. spread to the Eastern part of Zimbabwe (Chimanimani District), Chikomba District, Masvingo Province Chivi District, Gwanda District Matabeleland South. Commercial farmers in the Midlands Province of Zimbabwe have also adapted the practice. Njovu Trust Zambia (Choma and Monze Districts), Massai Mara Conservancy in Kenya, Botswana-Maun and Shakawe communities, Northern parts of Namibia.

The practice is cost-efficient, since the only tool needed is farmers' livestock. Therefore, it is easily replicable in other parts of the world that are threatened or already affected by desertification. The success of the practice depends on the training of the communities. In case there are no natural sources of water, additional infrastructure (bulky water supply) is needed.

In order to scale-up the practice, ACHM would need additional infrastructure, capacity building and knowledge, financial sources for mobilization, trainings, etc. Technological means as solar pumps and soil testing equipment are also needed.

## INTERVIEWEE FEEDBACK

### Number of points: 22 out of 23

Summary: The interviewees provided information about the practice and gave good answers with rich information about development, activities and functioning of the practice. The practice performed excellently across all questions, scoring almost full marks in all.

**1 (Sustainable use of resources) – 5.5/6** – The practice is based on mimicry of natural systems and as such promotes sustainable resource use in terms of soil fertility, fertilisers (manure rather than chemicals), water and plant health. Grazing in this way is conducive to favourable soil conditions and maximizes diversity as it allows natural regulation. From an economic point of view the practice is funded through external funds. At farmer level it is sustainable and provides short term and long term benefits.

**2 (Equity and eradication of poverty) - 4/4** – Community inclusion project which aims to provide benefits for all. Diversification of agriculture and incomes, combats dependence vulnerability. Targets women and trains in planned grazing, rather than men (as before). Supports local markets, e.g. with small groups of women supplying vegetables to local hotels/supermarkets.

**3 (Precautionary approach to human health, natural resources and ecosystems) - 2 / 2** – Promotion of natural livestock processes, a return to more natural ways of farming, encouraging indigenous seeds.

**4 (Public participation and access to information) - 3/3** – Information sharing and indigenous knowledge is at the centre of all activities. Members of the communities become custodians of knowledge. Documents and reports are also produced and shared with everyone. Community discussion groups run to revive the cycle of seeds, encouraging co-creation of knowledge.

**5 (Governance and human security) 3/3** – Transparency and fairness encouraged through promotion of constitutions within communities to define role of local chief, who is then involved throughout with committee. Bribery, corruption and alcoholism addressed in the constitutions. Seeks to support people as stewards of land and equip to fight desertification for the good of all.

**6 (Integration, interrelationship- human rights, social, economic and environmental objectives) - 2.5/3** – Community living to set rights and obligations of all. Healthy soil promoted, and therefore also food security and access to clean water. More productivity stimulated through improved nutrition. Diversification of species slows effects of climate change and enhances food security. However, little evidence available. Diversified and appropriate diet, locally sourced. Social aspects are community collaboration and job and income generation.

**7 (Common but differentiated obligations) - 2/2** – Appropriate for the region and life on the land. No vulnerable parties – shared labour and shared profit.



## CONTACT

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## LINKS AND FURTHER READING

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