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**IMPROVING THE LIVELIHOODS OF PERI-URBAN VEGETABLE GROWERS
THROUGH MARKET PROMOTION OF FRESH AND PROCESSED INDIGENOUS
VEGETABLES**

B 0110

Visit to Zimbabwe from 29 November -13 December 1999.

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Background

Most indigenous vegetables in Zimbabwe are currently collected from the wild and are not or hardly cultivated as witnessed in especially West, Central and East Africa. Indigenous leafy vegetables play a major role in Zimbabwe, especially during the early part of the rainy season, the relish gap, when exotic vegetables are scarce. There is a significant interest to further domesticate these vegetables by both cultivation and processing. The project aims to utilise this potential to improve the livelihoods of both producers and consumers in an urban and peri-urban environment. The present visit was made to initiate the project, hold discussions with key players and decision makers and to hold a planning meeting with representatives of the main institutes involved in the project.

Visit objectives

The main objectives of this visit were:

1. To hold a planning meeting with collaborators
2. To meet key stakeholders and decision makers
3. To visit potential project sites in three chosen cities
4. To establish milestones for follow-up activities
5. To set up project accounts.

Planning meeting

This meeting was held on Wednesday 1st December at the Quality International Hotel in Harare and was attended by Mrs T. Sibanda, the CPHP representative for Zimbabwe, Mrs Dadirai Chihande from CTDT (Commutech) and by three representatives from the Horticultural Research Centre (HRC): Messrs F C Ngwerume, N Nenguwo and B Mvere.

The participants appreciated and agreed with the project memorandum in general terms. One area remains to be resolved, e.g. the collaboration between CTDT and HRC. There is an overlap between the capabilities of CTDT and HRC whereby both organisations are strong in technical aspects and generally weak in socio-economics. Where HRC staff will receive a regular income from the government, CTDT will need to find funding to pay their staff, which is why an otherwise smooth collaboration could be distorted by financial constraints. This issue will be resolved once the NRI socio-economist arrives in January and when it becomes clear how much time is needed to carry out marketing surveys and similar work.

University of Zimbabwe

Dr Rufaro M Madakadze, horticulturist, welcomed the opportunity to carry out research on Zimbabwe's indigenous crops. She did however warn us that even though students may be keen to work with IVs, the same students depend heavily on outside funding. Therefore, unless funding can be found, there won't be any student who will be able to undertake research on the commodity groups selected by the project.

Action: **Fabeon Chigumira** to investigate to what extent the project could contribute towards the costs of a student such as providing food and accommodation in Marondera

Further discussions were held with Elias Madzudzo of the Department of Sociology in connection with recruitment of enumerators for the first phase of the project, a socio-economic survey in three major cities. The response was rather similar with a message that students can be found as long as there is an adequate budget for them.

Agritex

Similar discussions were held with Langton Mukwereza, Chief Agricultural Specialist in the Department of Agricultural, Technical and Extension Services. He was pleased to learn that his former classmate at Wye College, Andrew Goodland, would be coming to Harare to conduct a marketing study on traditional crops. According to Mr Mukwereza, it is probably not difficult to find qualified enumerators to assist with the proposed survey. In addition, he mentioned that since AGRITEX staff are government officials, there is no need to be worried about high staff fees.

Meeting with Dr Ntombi R Gata, Head of the Department of Research and Specialist Services (DR&SS)

Dr Gata mentioned that she was pleased that there is now a project dealing with indigenous food. However, she asked to change the collaborator to DR&SS – HRC instead of HRC directly. It became clear that she would like to have a strong control over the project and she emphasised the following points:

- Add a dimension of environmental stewardship training, practical skills and Godly values for stewardship of God's creation
- Link the project with the Mutekedza Integrated R&D Zunde (=Food Security) Programme with immediate effect
- The project can not have its own foreign currency account but instead, all project funds should be transferred to DR&SS in the form of a donation
- The interest on the project account, currently about 50% annually on money market rates, to go to DR&SS and be used as a surcharge for its overheads. If this is not agreeable, NRI should find another way to pay an overhead surcharge for the services provided.

Note: Utilisation and enhancement of traditional values and culture are highly favoured in the present day policy of the country and the promotion of indigenous crops is a favourite topic of Dr Gata, the sister of Zimbabwe's President, Robert Mugabe. Therefore, the project's aims are most welcome to her, especially since it fits well in her ZUNDE programme's food system cycle. It appears that this is behind her wish to control the project. There was virtually no discussion and no agreement was reached. I mentioned that the ZUNDE programme would be a good exit strategy for the project once new varieties and seeds have become available. However, with the present emphasis on research it would be better for research work to be left with HRC. At the end of the meeting I informed Dr Gata that I had no authority to make decisions on the administrative issues which she raised but would discuss them with colleagues at NRI.

Visit potential project sites in Harare, Mutare and Bulawao

The timing of the visit coincided with the relish gap, a period at the beginning of the rainy season when there are very few vegetables on the market. Peri-urban growers have

established their nurseries for exotic crops and indigenous weedy crops have not yet grown to a size where they could be harvested. This is exactly the period when IV farmers can benefit from early and rapid growth at a time when there is limited competition from exotic vegetables. It was noticed that the few indigenous vegetables found were eagerly taken up by customers for prices which were the same or higher than kale. It was also noticed that there was a good demand for dried leafy vegetables, especially for cowpea leaves and dried leaves of spiderplants.

It was interesting to see that several people were selling shoots of the weed blackjack. This is regarded as a crop in Malawi and apparently also in the Eastern Highlands as seen on Mutare's Sakubva market. These blackjacks are removed as a weed from commercial farms with irrigation and brought to the market for sale. Other local vegetables such as amaranth were scarce. An arrangement was made with the Provincial Horticulturist, Mr Elias Mutimutema, to record the presence of IVs on a weekly basis, expressed in volume, price and diversity. A scale has been purchased to facilitate its recording.

Potential sites for a socio-economic study around Mutare are the Honde Valley, a hot and humid area, approximately 100 km from Mutare, the drier communal area Zimunya which is close to Mutare and Nyanga with its diverse climatic conditions.

The situation in Bulawayo was found to be rather different and it is here that IVs are most popular, judging by the volume and diversity seen at the market. The most common one was the spiderplant, called Lude in the local Ndebele language. According to Mrs B Ntube, resident horticulturist with Agritex, there is even a demand for dried spiderplant as an export product to Botswana.

Other fresh indigenous vegetables include several species of amaranth and several species of *Corchorus*, but mainly *Corchorus asplenifolius* and *C. tridens*. The most common dried vegetable was found to be cowpea leaves but also leaves of kale and spiderplant.

Milestones

An agreement was reached for the following activities:

- Literature review by 31st January 2000
- Description of current production practices by 28 February
- Description of current post-harvest and processing practices by 28 February

Project accounts and other financial issues

Pending further negotiations with Dr Gata, a decision was made to open a local currency current account with Barclays Bank in Marondera. This account will attract an interest rate of 20% which will be available for use by the project.

With regards to other financial issues it was noticed that imported goods are very expensive in Zimbabwe. Consideration should therefore be given to purchase e.g. a computer in the U.K. rather than in Zimbabwe. **Action: Mr Schippers** to investigate prices in the U.K. together with transport costs and **Mr Chigumira** to investigate whether it is possible to import project goods free from duty and sales tax.