

5.2 DEVELOPING CENTRES OF EXCELLENCE ON ENDOGENOUS DEVELOPMENT

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AZTREC - the Association of Zimbabwean Traditional Environmental Conservationists - was formed in 1985 by freedom fighters, chiefs and spirit mediums, to focus on environmental conservation and cultural survival. AZTREC's activities are centred on eco-cultural villages, where many income-generating activities are taking place.

Since time immemorial the African worldview is based on the understanding that the living world depends on the tripartite relationship between humans, nature and the spiritual world. Nature is considered to be the habitat of the spirits. In addition to agriculture, people lived from collected fruits, mushrooms, honey and meat from the forests, while traditional medicine was used to cure and prevent diseases. During the Zimbabwean liberation struggle in the 1970s, the chiefs and spirit mediums worked closely with the freedom fighters in training them to interpret signals from the natural world, and in advising them to respect nature. A lot of blood was shed during this period, and, according to our tradition, the people and the natural resources had to go through a cleansing process thereafter. When the war ended in 1980, war veterans, chiefs and spirit mediums took upon themselves the task of facilitating the reburial of war victims, and cleansing the sacred woodlands, wetlands and shrines.

After the liberation struggle. During the liberation struggle the fundamental principles of the new free Zimbabwe were handed down through the spiritual world. Some of these fundamental principles were that: the colonial socio-cultural order was to be replaced by a truly African one; the colonial economic system was to be replaced by a system that reflected African identity which could be complemented by other worldviews; and the land should be equally distributed. As time went by, the new government did not address these pressing issues that the people had been struggling for. In fact, in the early 1980s laws were passed which withdrew the power of the chiefs, and created local councillors, who failed to recognise the responsibilities of chiefs and spirit mediums as the ancient administrators of land and natural resources. This led to a dramatic loss in the quality of woodlands, wetlands and other natural resources, as the traditional rules and regulations, which had protected them thus far, were no longer enforced by the local leaders.

Shona cosmivision

The people of the three communities areas mentioned where AZTREC is working are of the Karanga ethnic tribe of the Shona peoples. According to the Karanga people, the ancestral spirits are the owners of humankind and responsible for its wellbeing. Their cosmivision is based on the three pillars of African philosophy: the human world, the natural world and the spiritual world.

Human world. In the human world every person has a personal spirit. Spirit mediums are a special category of human beings, who are 'possessed' by the ancestral spirits. Thus important ancestors are able to communicate with living beings and guide the people. There are different levels of spiritual authority, ranging from individual to family, sub-clan, clan, tribal, ethnic national, regional and continental levels. Within the human world there are traditional leaders, such as chiefs and sub-chiefs, who represent a particular area. Usually a new chief is appointed by the spirit of the one who founded the clan, who returns as a spirit through one of his descendants. A group of headmen and kraalheads constitute the highest board of chieftainship.

Natural world. Sacred places include shrines, water bodies and particular species within the natural world. In the animal kingdom, lions, baboons, snakes and birds such as the bat-teleur eagle, are considered sacred. In the Karanga cosmovision, the human world heavily depends on special messages from the spiritual world, which are transmitted through these sacred animals. For these animals to perform their functions as intermediaries, a conducive habitat is required, which implies the need for ecological diversity. When diversity is degraded, these sacred animals migrate to other places, and can no longer serve the humans in the area. Therefore, people are not permitted to hunt wild animals, fell trees or collect wild fruits for sale in specific places. Violation of these rules and regulations are believed to result in the disappearance of the voice of *Musikavanhu*, or God.

Spiritual world. The spiritual world encompasses both the natural world and human society, inhabited by the spirits. Musikavanhu is supreme in this hierarchy, the creator of the natural and human world that has existed since the beginning of times. The spiritual world consists of different spirits with various meeting places, responsibilities, tasks and functions. There are, for example, spirits specialised in war strategies, technology development, rainmaking and human health. Some of the spirits warn people about diseases and problems, which could affect the entire nation.

AZTREC

During the year 1985 local consultative meetings were held in 7 provinces, where local authorities like traditional chiefs, village heads, and spirit mediums, who were at the same time farmers, met to discuss the degradation of nature, lack of land, and food security. They discussed a new strategy for Zimbabwe, which would take into account indigenous practices and traditional leaders in natural resource and land-use management. They decided to form the Association of Zimbabwean Traditional Environmental Conservationists, AZTREC. This NGO, presently based in Masvingo province in southern Zimbabwe, has about 20 field staff. The majority of the members of the executive committee, as well as the spirit mediums, is female. The three community areas where AZTREC is working in the context of Compas are Zimuto, Mupata and Charumbira, which are characterised by low rainfall (400-600 mm per year) and poor sandy soils. Deforestation, uncontrolled grazing, mono-cultures and inappropriate tillage systems have led to widespread soil erosion and destruction of natural resources. Soils and water bodies are polluted with chemical

fertilisers and insecticides, and the rivers are no longer reliable sources of drinking water. Altogether, these processes have resulted in low crop yields, loss of biodiversity, desertification and health hazards. The influential spirit medium Mrs Ambuya Nehanda was appointed as the patron of the new organisation. Since 1985 these general meetings of the traditional leaders are held twice a year, to guide and advice the organisation.

Tree nurseries as central element. Because of its obvious importance for the farming families, AZTREC decided to take woodland management as the starting point for activities. This included both sacred and ordinary forests and water resources. In order to start community based natural resource management, the chiefs talked to the kraalheads assemblies (*matate*) in their respective areas. They analysed the status of the local natural resources, and discussed the need to resuscitate traditional rules to protect them. Land for planting new trees, existing degraded woodlands, dried springs and vleis, and sacred natural sites in their area were identified, along with the traditional regulations necessary for managing these sites. Each chief held meetings with the respective communities to discuss these issues. The village heads began to take over responsibility for natural resource management, though officially this task was still in the hands of the government elected councillors. Under the guidance of the traditional leaders and their assemblies, nurseries with indigenous tree species were set up by AZTREC in seven districts.

As had been expected, this process faced considerable government resistance at different levels, for example the Forest Commission officials. It reached a head when, in 1998, AZTREC decided to become a formally registered organisation, and therefore required government approval. At first this request was rejected. But having visited AZTREC's nurseries of indigenous tree species, the Forest Commission officials were impressed, as they had considered it impossible to grow indigenous seedlings in a relatively short period. The seedlings were offered by AZTREC for the National Tree Planting Day organised by the Forest Commission, on condition that the local chiefs would perform the rituals during the planting activities. The ceremonies were conducted, the activity was highly successful, and the survival rate of these seedlings was much higher than that of ordinary seedlings offered by the Forest Department. This was the start of the formal recognition of AZTREC by the Government.

Once AZTREC was officially recognised and donors could be approached for financial support, extension staff was based in the tree nurseries. The villages around the nurseries would bring in seeds according to their requirements for the season ahead. School children would come to collect humus, fill polythene bags, and prune seedlings roots. When it was time to plant the trees, the community would take the seedlings to their homes, or used them in community orchards and woodlots. This work developed over the years and AZTREC manages 12 central tree nurseries at present. Altogether the nurseries provide nearly 50,000 seedlings each year, with 75% indigenous species, and 25% exotic fruit trees, such as mango. Since 1985 a total of 500,000 seedlings have been planted in the woodlots in some forty communities in each of the seven districts. Moreover, AZTREC has gradually taken over all the government-run tree nurseries from the Forest Commission. Many of the woodlots established in the early days have matured, and are now providing fruits, medicine, honey, and construction material, which are used for

home consumption and for marketing. The central tree nurseries have evolved into commercial centres, where these products are processed, stored and sold.

From tree nurseries to eco-cultural villages. Ten years later, the idea to diversify the activities was conceived. Thorough consultations amongst the people in the communities, traditional leaders, and local government were carried out, which resulted in the idea of intensifying the activities on the locality of the tree nurseries. The spiritual world, through the national spirit medium, advised that the traditional assemblies should be revived at the level of each ethnic group and clan for providing guidance. This traditional assembly is the gathering of local spirit mediums, chiefs, headmen, kraalheads, elders and youth, both men and women, to discuss current social, economic, environmental and cultural issues. When these traditional assemblies started to meet regularly at the central nurseries, the spirit mediums advised them to construct a sacred hut and assembly hall. The central nurseries were thus transformed into eco-cultural villages.

The patron of AZTREC and national spirit medium, Ambuya Nehanda, lives in Mashonaland West, where the first Chikuti eco-cultural village was established nearly 20 years ago. Here, all chiefs and spirit mediums meet regularly to get advice and refresher courses on indigenous knowledge systems, culture and African cosmovision. The second centre is the Zimuto eco-cultural village, which was established in 1998 on 10 ha of land. The physical layout of this centre consists of sacred areas, including a *dendemaro*, or sacred hut for rituals, and a *dare*, or meeting place and residence for spirit mediums, as well as research and training areas. The latter comprises a showroom, a traditional health clinic and pharmacy, a culture and entertainment area, as well as a tree nursery and fields for organic crop production. Another area is designated for the construction of chalets for tourists. In Charumbira and Mupata the physical infrastructure of the eco-cultural villages is being established.

The transformation of the nurseries into the eco-cultural centres has been, and still is, a process guided by the traditional assembly. Formulation of policies and approval of annual strategic plans for the centres is facilitated by this assembly, which also presides over cultural events, rain-making ceremonies, rituals, and the management of sacred woodlands and mountains in the area. Decisions are taken by consensus, in consultation with the ancestors through spirit mediums. The appropriate rites to appease the spiritual world are performed before, during and after any development initiative. Experience shows that after such rites have been performed, communities tend to own and sustain the initiatives.

Building on committees of natural experts. Natural experts, such as farmer innovators, medical practitioners, hunters, architects, foretellers, conflict managers, rain makers, warriors, tool makers, craftsmen and musicians are found in most communities. These custodians of traditional skills can, given proper support and recognition, accelerate the process of endogenous development by providing demonstrations to other community members. AZTREC, and its collaborating partners, have identified the thematic areas on endogenous development, and organised committees of natural experts accordingly. Thus, the cultural committee in Zimuto is composed of three chiefs, senior spirit medi-

ums, elders as well as knowledgeable men and women, who are responsible for conflict resolution in the area, ritual performances at the centre and co-ordination of the different committees.

The agriculture committee includes men and women who have above average harvests, and possess natural talents related to aspects like water conservation, pest management, grain storage and seed selection. There are also biodiversity experts who possess in-depth knowledge on the characteristics of woodlands, wetlands and sacred groves. The technology committee includes natural experts in sculpture, tool making and garment making, while the natural medicine committee includes natural health experts for humans and animals, as well as health spirit mediums. The entertainment committee includes traditional music and drama experts, while the food committee is responsible for food processing and marketing of the products of surrounding forests and orchards. According to African cosmovision, these different natural experts are linked to supernatural powers, either through dreams or the interpretation of natural signs. Each committee is responsible for documenting the knowledge in its own field of expertise, exchanging the knowledge with other groups, testing selected practices, and imparting the results to local communities, visitors and tourists.

Links with other institutions. AZTREC has been one of the training organisations within PELUM (Participatory Ecological Land Use Management) College Zimbabwe. This mobile training institution is made up of community-based organisations and higher learning institutions, such as the University of Zimbabwe, Africa University and the Forestry College of Zimbabwe. AZTREC facilitates the use of indigenous knowledge systems, culture, cosmovision and community organisation, while Zimuto eco-cultural village hosts the trainees during their visits to the area.

In 2000 AZTREC was appointed by the Government CREATE programme, (Community Based Resettlement Approaches and Technologies), to assist in training 400 resettled farmers in sustainable agriculture and natural resources management. In the Mushandike Conservancy, AZTREC will implement research on biodiversity and wildlife management, traditional medicine and eco-tourism.

Activities in the communities

Woodland and mountains. AZTREC decided to take woodlands and mountain ecosystem management as the starting point for its activities in the communities. This was due to the obvious importance of these natural sites for the farming families. People consider these habitats of the spirits and places where rituals and ceremonies can be performed to appease and communicate with the spiritual world. Some of the tree species in these woodlands and mountains, such as *Brachystegia* and *Ficus spp.*, are used to forecast the weather, the types of crops to be grown during each season and the times of sowing.

As has been described earlier in this chapter, the work on woodland improvement started off with discussions between spirit mediums, chiefs and kraalheads on re-establishing the traditional rules and regulations. Together they started to identify the different sacred sites in their area, and held meetings with the communities to discuss these issues.

The village chiefs began to take over responsibility for the natural resources again, and tree nurseries with indigenous tree species were started in several districts. Over the past decades tree planting has been a central element in AZTREC's activities. The villagers would bring in seeds of indigenous trees, and, at the start of the tree planting season, the community would take the seedlings to their homes, or for community orchards and wood lots. In this process the 12 nurseries are providing some 50,000 seedlings a year, of which 75% are indigenous and 25% are exotic.

A total of 400 ha of sacred woodland have been rehabilitated in the areas of Zimuto, Mupata and Charumbira, as well as 29 springs and 5 shrines. Forestry products, such as mushrooms, honey, wild fruits, timber, medicine and meat, are collected for consumption and marketing. Processing and marketing the fruits of the orchards has become a successful activity: in the Zimuto eco-cultural village, fruits are processed for the local market. It is planned that fruit processing will be commercially carried out for local and export markets in the near future. This process is supported by the food processing division of the Bulawayo Polytechnic University.

Another positive aspect of this activity is improved biodiversity and habitats for spiritually important beings, such as snakes, birds, animals and mermaids, which enhance the communication between the human and the spiritual world. The role of indigenous knowledge, culture and cosmovision in natural resource management has been re-valued and recognised in the lives of the people. At a more tangible level, the income per household has improved from the consumption and sale of meat from game and birds, construction material, crafts and natural medicines. On the longer term, we have observed positive effects on the rainfall pattern, the soil structure and the water holding capacity of the soil.

Improving wetlands. Outside the eco-cultural villages, some 30 wetlands with an average size of six hectares have been rehabilitated under the guidance of chiefs and spirit mediums. The Masvingo province is often affected by droughts, leading to a severe shortage of grazing for domestic animals. The wetlands provide an oasis of food and water for both humans and animals, an abundance of grass for thatching, reeds for baskets, while relish in the form of mice, birds and locusts also come from these wetlands. Potters collect the clay soils from the wetlands to make clay pots for sale in the community. As a result of these uses, and due to drought, soil erosion and desertification, the wetlands in the area were severely threatened.

AZTREC conducted a study to understand the situation of the wetlands in the area, and to find entry points for participatory rehabilitation programmes. During the first consultative meeting with the local traditional leaders and spirit mediums, the objectives were agreed upon, and the resource persons were determined. Each wetland turned out to have its own historical development and cultural dimension. Traditionally, the spirit mediums make decisions about the wetlands, and the chiefs, headmen and kraal heads enforce the regulations. These regulations state that certain trees in the wetland cannot be felled, washing is not allowed, soap is prohibited, and only traditional utensils such as earthen pots are allowed for collection of water. During menstruation women are not allowed to enter the wetlands and men must remain celibate when working therein. The study also revealed

that the wetlands have great development potential, and that the communities were eager to conserve and manage this resource in a sustainable way. Many wetlands have the capacity to provide water for micro-irrigation activities, while for the people, protecting these wetlands also means protecting the habitat of the spiritual world.

In the areas of Zimuto, Charumbira and Mupata, nine traditional practitioners who could support the rehabilitation of wetlands were identified, and the traditional regulations to protect them were re-established. The experience has been positive, 6 fish ponds, 10 ha banana plantation, 26 market gardens, and 35 bee hives have been established in the 23 rehabilitated wetlands of around 5 ha. each. All are managed by the local communities, and have enhanced the local food security and income situation.

Traditional health practices. The terrible pandemic HIV/AIDS has affected a great number of young and middle-aged people. The natural medicine committee is composed of experts in medicinal plants and other health practices for humans and animals. These experts exchange their knowledge and practices to draw up and maintain a register of medicinal plants and uses. This register now includes some 100 plants for common diseases and 180 plants for a variety of more complicated ailments. Traditional healthcare clinics for humans and animals have been established at the Zimuto and Chikuti eco-cultural villages. Patients receive treatment with plant-based medicine, while payment may be in the form of labour or the gift of a chicken or goat.

To systematically integrate traditional medical practices into the mainstream health delivery system, networking with like minded institutions is encouraged. For example, three members of this committee have received a two-year course on how to process natural medicine into tablets, capsules, oils and perfumes at the department of medicine of the University of Zimbabwe. As a result, herbal medicines are now readily available in the community at affordable prices. Over the past three years collaboration with like-minded traditional medical practitioners within Zimbabwe and other Southern African countries has been established. Traditional medical practitioners from South Africa, Swaziland, Mozambique, Botswana, Malawi and Zambia have visited the cultural village during its inception in 1999, where they observed striking similarities with their own traditional medical expertise.

Organic agriculture. The activities in the eco-cultural centres also include experiments and training in organic agriculture. The concept of organic agriculture is also filtering into the communities. Three communities have committees of agriculture, which include men and women with varied expertise. The local committees are further divided into smaller groups with specific topics like seed varieties and selection, inter-cropping, pest and disease management, grain storage, soil fertility, and animal health and nutrition. A register of the different traditional techniques has been made, as well as a baseline of each area in terms of the history and current status of natural resources, arable plots, vegetable gardens, and the type and status of soil. The process of farmer experimentation included workshops on Participatory Technology Development (PTD) with the communities in each area, where farmer innovators and traditional practitioners presented their experiences. Participants also discussed the role of spirit mediums and other spiritual elements

in agricultural activities, and agreed on a framework for experimentation. Thus, for example, various varieties of drought resistant indigenous crops were selected, and are now being tested to evaluate their performance. Documenting this process at field level has been difficult, however, and AZTREC has sought the collaboration of PELUM College Zimbabwe.

Over 40 farmers who combine indigenous knowledge and experiences of organic agriculture have established organic farming plots on their homesteads. They have divided themselves into two groups: one group works with vegetable gardens using organic manure, intercropping and bio-pesticides; the second group focuses on organic dryland crop production. The vegetable gardens have generated considerable income for the families and have led to improvements in their nutritional status. The farmers working on dryland farming have carried out experiments with finger millet, bulrush millet and maize based on organic manure, non-toxic herbicides and different inter-cropping techniques. Traditional ceremonies are held to request the ancestors to protect crops from pests and diseases. It was found that organically produced crops could withstand drought better than chemically produced crops. During the 1999-2000 and 2000-2001 seasons the crops gave a good harvest. On half an acre of each crop, farmer innovators harvested between 2.5 and 3 tonnes, where earlier harvests had been less than 1 tonne. Moreover, 19 farmer innovators have opened seed banks of millets, sorghum, maize and groundnuts, while other agricultural inputs, such as manure and implements, are now more readily available in the communities. Slowly, extension staff from the government is becoming convinced of the value of organic agriculture. Some of them are now being trained by AZTREC.



AZTREC staff participate in a ceremony to celebrate the establishment of organic vegetable gardens.

Technology development. People in Zimbabwe have over the centuries gathered a wealth of knowledge on the extraction of mineral deposits of chrome, gold and copper, and processing them into finished products such as spears, hoes and plates. This reinforces the African belief that the discovery of a new technology does not require formal education, but rather the influence of supernatural forces: an innovative technological genius gets his expertise through dreams. AZTREC, in consultation with traditional authorities of Zimuto, Mupata and Charumbira, has identified at least ten experts in each community who make farming tools and handicrafts, such as weaving, carpentry and pottery, for sale to the local communities, visitors and tourists. The Technical Colleges in Zimbabwe have shown great interest in working with these natural experts, so as to enhance their capacity with elements of modern technology.

Activities at the eco-cultural centres

Learning about indigenous knowledge. Indigenous knowledge, culture and cosmology are generally known from the memories and stories of the elders. African history that is taught in Zimbabwean schools today does not adequately cover the traditional systems of its indigenous peoples. The rapid disappearance of the local languages is re-enforcing the need to research and document the experiences, knowledge systems, practices, values and norms of local communities. A part of this wealth of information has been documented by AZTREC and the subcommittees of natural experts, and stored in the library established at the Zimuto cultural village. The local primary and secondary schools are benefiting from this information in their environmental and cultural education, while adults and elders in the communities are using it for their experiments. There is a considerable collection of traditional artefacts on display at the cultural village, while the documented knowledge and experiences are also presented through videos and the AZTREC magazine called 'The Three Worlds'.

In-depth research in the three communities was done in close consultation with the chiefs after consultation of the spirit mediums. The spirit mediums advised the chiefs to call for gatherings to identify farmer innovators and traditional practitioners, and traditional ceremonies were held to bless their research. This idea was endorsed both by the communities and the traditional leaders, and was carried out using the methodology of Rapid Appraisal of Agricultural Knowledge Systems (RAAKS). The influence of the different individuals in the different spheres of traditional knowledge was thus determined. In the area of natural resources, for example, it turned out that the chiefs, together with their kraalheads and elders and with guidance of the spirit mediums, have the greatest amount of influence. In agriculture, ordinary farmers and the 'master farmers', who have received special agricultural training in high-external-input farming and intensive support by the government extension service, appear to have less influence than successful organic farmers.

Training and education through traditional experts. The eco-cultural centres promote spiritually endorsed innovations, and provide training to members of the community and school children, organised by the committees of traditional experts. These activ-

ities take into account gender and age differences; for example, experts in pottery are usually female, professional farmer innovators are both male and female, while foresters are often youth. There is a wide range of activities organised by the cultural committee, as well as the subcommittees on agriculture, natural medicine, technology, food processing and entertainment. Here, we present the activities of the entertainment committee as an example.

Many communal activities and festivities, including music, songs and folk tales, take place at the Zimuto eco-cultural centre. Ten traditional music experts train several entertainment groups in traditional music and dance, explaining to them the meaning of each type of expression. African communities cannot do without song and dance during events such as funerals, marriages, and worship, as it is an integral part of their way of life. The committee has documented the different categories of songs, each with its own dancing style and musical instruments, such as hunting songs, war songs, revolutionary songs, funeral songs, rainmaking songs, and worship songs. The natural music experts also entertain visitors and train foreigners who want to learn and practice African music. In fact, entertainment has turned out to be an extraordinarily sustainable activity.

Promoting educational tourism. Another more recently developed activity at the eco-cultural centres, is the promotion of tourism. It is on the one hand for the national and international researchers, who come to carry out participatory research on the cultures and livelihoods of the people, and on the other for groups of tourists who want to experience African culture. To encourage the latter, a relationship was established with an organisa-



A village planning workshop is concluded with a traditional festival with youth, elders, chiefs and spirit mediums taking part.

tion in the Netherlands, which sends groups of 18-20 tourists for a stay of one week. They are received and guided by the community and the traditional leaders, and have to abide by the traditional rules set by the spirit mediums. Tourists in turn offer their knowledge in managerial and administrative skills, some of which have been used to improve systems in the cultural village.

Other activities. Communities can also organise special meetings to discuss specific problems at the centres. A community with a problem like an increased incidence of rape can discuss the situation and analyse how it can be improved. This process is guided by a spirit medium.

Lessons learned

Some constraints. The experiences with enhancing endogenous development have certainly not been without contradictions and constraints in the politically and socially unstable situation of present day Zimbabwe. We will mention the most striking aspects here.

- Cultural erosion has been serious, and the persisting conventional practices often overshadow the value of indigenous practices.
- Indigenous knowledge systems, culture and cosmovision have never been documented for use in education from primary to tertiary level.
- The top-down style of working with the communities, which is still dominant with a part of the government extension staff, is in contradiction to the AZTREC approach which assumes that communities are in control of their experimentation and innovations.
- There is no government policy to support the integration of indigenous knowledge systems, culture and cosmovision into mainstream development.
- The relationship between traditional spiritual values and practices and the formal church and religion leads to some tensions.
- The market for traditional products is still limited, while the quality of the local products does not always meet the requirements of the market. Although the ceremonies are well attended, it is possible that some people come for the food, drinks and entertainment, not identifying themselves with the beliefs and values contained in the ceremonies.
- Language differences between ethnic groups, and between rural people and academia, is a major obstacle for more people to benefit from the documented indigenous knowledge.

Towards endogenous development. AZTREC is a community-owned organisation totally engaged in development initiatives. Its philosophy and development agenda is above party-politics. The focus is to promote the welfare of every Zimbabwean notwithstanding tribe or political affiliation. This is demonstrated by 17 years of lobbying and advocating for reinstatement of chiefs, spirit mediums and natural experts. The majority of the people in Zimuto, Charumbira and Mupata have made a turn from exogenous to endogenous solutions for their problems. In this process, however, it is imperative to make

a good choice of solutions from outside and fuse them with the traditional way of solving problems. There is an increasing feeling among this population that, unless people go back to their roots, there cannot be true sustainable development, because: "*What is borrowed shall never be yours*".

The five main thematic areas on endogenous development, culture and entertainment, natural resources, organic agriculture, traditional health, and technology and food processing, will continue to be the major focus for AZTREC's future activities. Indigenous languages and policy formulation will also be given attention. The aim is to further empower the different kinds of natural experts through capacity building programmes at individual level, while on-farm demonstrations and the eco-cultural villages will showcase the outcome of their practices. The results will be documented, and will allow for scientific analysis of the findings on each of the thematic areas.

Schools of higher learning are increasingly supportive of this development path, spearheaded by traditional leaders. AZTREC is presently collaborating with Bulawayo Polytechnic University in establishing an innovative training university on endogenous development, the future International Centre on Endogenous Development (ICED). This university will enrol students from the south African region who will be trained in the different thematic areas of endogenous development. The Ministry of Higher Education, through the Bulawayo Polytechnic University, will collaborate with ICED in research, curriculum development, documentation and practical assignments of students. The Government of Zimbabwe has allocated 40 hectares of land to AZTREC on which the ICED will be established. The establishment will be done through the guidance of the traditional national assembly of spirit mediums who will work closely with natural experts.

This International Centre for Endogenous Development will build on the experiences built up over the past 17 years in the communities and eco-cultural villages. The positive effect on the income and culture of the people involved, can thus be spread to other regions and countries throughout South Africa.