

Werribee Open Range Zoo takes sustainability education to Zimbabwe



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Contemporary learning theories tell us that environmental education delivered without an action component can create eco-phobia amongst future generations. So how do we teach students visiting our Zoos about global issues such as the bush-meat crisis or poaching without disempowering them?

As the education team at Werribee Open Range Zoo searched for answers to that very question, the Tikki Hywood Trust, a Non Government Organisation based within Zimbabwe was seeking answers to a complementary question. The Tikki Hywood Trust (THT) research, breed and rehabilitate Zimbabwe's 'lesser known' species such as the Pangolin, Lichenstein's Hartebeest and Serval. In 2006, Lisa Hywood, a Zimbabwean and founder of the THT asked herself whether the trust could be doing more to ensure the survival of Zimbabwe's lesser-known species. Fortunately, Lisa realised that the answer to her question was simple. To assist Zimbabwe's wildlife she would need to work with Zimbabwe's people.

In May 2006, Lisa Hywood approached Werribee Open Range Zoo (WORZ) seeking assistance. The Tikki Hywood Trust wanted to establish an education program that would promote sustainable behaviours within local communities situated alongside THT animal release sites. One year later an insitu conservation education project called Kusanganisa was established within three pilot schools located in rural Zimbabwe. Kusanganisa means connect in Shona, and was developed as a partnership between THT and the education team at Werribee Open Range Zoo. Having received initial support from Zoos Victoria's Friends of the Zoo, Rachel Lowry (Team Leader Discovery and Learning at WORZ)



was able to visit Zimbabwe in 2006 to assess the needs and resource requirements of the communities wanting to get involved. The program that was developed takes a coordinated approach to sustainability education, and supports teachers by assisting with the development and delivery of an integrated curriculum from grade 0 to grade 7. The enthusiasm of the teachers based within the schools was overwhelmingly positive. However, it was evident that the teachers would require training for the project to be implemented successfully. In February 2007 two of Zoos Victoria's educators (Rachel Lowry and Katie Pahlow) returned to Zimbabwe to conduct teacher training and deliver the resources required to implement the program.

Since the teacher training in February, each of the three schools have set-up or increased the size of their market gardens, and have undergone training run by the Tikki Hywood Trust to increase their gardens' productivity. Compost heaps and fruit orchards have also been established and two schools have begun rabbit breeding. Fuel briquette machines have now been placed within each school, allowing students to make fuel briquettes from leaf litter as an alternative to native trees. The ultimate aim of the project is to equip Zimbabwe's future generations with the skills and capacity needed to depend on sustainable food sources. Chicken and Guinea Pig breeding will therefore also become features of the program when funds become available.



Twenty eight teachers, two game scouts, and 1100 students participated in the teacher training conducted by Zoos Victoria staff. The participants were introduced to a three-phased approach to environmental education that is designed to promote the acquisition of skills, knowledge and behaviours.

PHASE 1 – CONNECT (Grade 0 – to Grade 3)

Building connections between children and wildlife

PHASE 2 – UNDERSTAND (Grade 4 – Grade 6)

Developing deeper understandings of our natural world

PHASE 3 – ACT (Grade 7)

Providing students with the skills needed to live sustainably

Werribee Open Range Zoo (WORZ) has managed to secure the wages for three local game scouts who will continue to train, monitor and assess the success of the program. The THT has secured the support of Zimbabwe Parks and Wildlife Management Authorities, allowing the Grade 3 students from each school to enjoy and view their native wildlife free of charge each year within local game reserves. The resources developed and donated by students visiting Werribee Open Range Zoo will be distributed to Zimbabwe twice a year thanks to the generosity of the SAVE Foundation Australia.

With the support of Zoo staff, volunteers and visitors the WORZ Discovery and Learning team were able to reach their ultimate goal; to deliver learning experiences within the zoo that facilitate connections and actions on a global scale. What began as a venture to link Australian children to global issues, has now evolved into the Kusanganisa *in situ* education program, a program with the potential to inspire change well beyond our border.

If you would like further details regarding this project then please email the author. ♦

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