

# THE CHILONGA CATTLE FEEDLOT PROJECT

Tiani Lisenga, the Cattle Feedlot Project Coordinator, is an enterprising man who is determined to contribute to the development of his community. During 2013 Tiani, together with the Chilonga Traditional Leadership, approached Hippo Valley Estates for assistance with income generating community development projects, with a proposal for an abattoir business at the top of his list of initiatives. The fact that the project could contribute to the size and quality of the national cattle herd was of particular interest to the company. The Tongaat Hulett operations in Zimbabwe, comprising of Hippo Valley Estates and Triangle, partnered with the Government of Zimbabwe, the Chiredzi Rural District Council and the Chilonga community in a unique Public Private Partnership (PPP) to revive the livestock industry in the Lowveld through the Chilonga Feedlot Project.

## Chilonga Community

The Chilonga Community lies to the south of Runde River, before it enters the Gonarezhou National Park, in the Matibi II Communal area. Matibi II is one of the least food secure communal lands in Zimbabwe. It has a population of more than 50 000 people and a population density in excess of 23 people per km<sup>2</sup>. This density figure translates into an average land holding of about 35 hectares per household in a region where a household, with minimal external inputs available for dry land farming, requires at least 20 hectares of arable land for crop farming (five hectares tilled each year on a four year rotation) and about 400 hectares for grazing land to support livestock. There is presently a single small-scale irrigation scheme of 201 hectares. The Chilonga Ward 6 comprises:

- 3 120 households
- four dip tanks
- two clinics
- four primary schools and one secondary school
- about 65 Boreholes
- 7 000 head of cattle

The region receives an average annual rainfall of less than 500mm and the erratic rainfall pattern, long mid-season dry spells and periodic droughts make cropping in the community risky and unsustainable. This however makes the region ideal for zero grazing livestock farming.

Horticultural produce from the irrigation scheme, which requires high inputs and technical knowhow, contributes to the community's sources of income. The scheme has not been able to substantially improve or increase household and community food security. Most households rely on livestock production as an essential component of livelihood strategies.

The Chilonga Community in Wards 6 & 7 has a combined total of 14 000 head of cattle. Over the years the high cattle numbers have led to overgrazing, loss of pastureland, illegal grazing in Hippo Valley wildlife areas and land degradation, encompassing deforestation and loss of biodiversity. The prevailing drought coupled by poor land use have led to the community resorting to selling some of their stock as a means of poverty alleviation.

## Public Private Partnership

The PPP has as its objectives improving the livelihoods of local communities, increasing the quality of livestock in

the region, empowerment of local marginalised societies, rural development and land use improvement, enhancing environmental sustainability and improving stockowners ability to control cattle diseases.

## Tongaat Hulett's Investment

The facility comprises of a cattle handling pen, cattle sales pen (which can hold up to 2 000 cattle), cattle loading ramp, two store rooms and a cattle feeding facility. The water for the feedlot is provided through two solar powered boreholes. A total investment of US\$144 000 was made as one of Tongaat Hulett's socio-economic development (SED) initiatives. The facility can be used for stock feed in cattle fattening initiatives, as a dairy collection centre from small scale farmers, as a cattle auction centre for abattoirs, as a cattle handling facility for veterinary purposes or for disease control.

## Beneficiaries

The Chilonga Cattle Feedlot Project Cooperative consists of 27 members of whom eight are women. Banks that have showed interest in the project include CBZ Bank and Agribank with the latter having issued loans amounting to US\$9 000. The Cooperative is working together with the Tongaat Hulett team to ensure sustainability and continued financing of the project. The team is currently looking at setting up a revolving facility for future funding of similar projects.

Tiani Lisenga says the project has assisted him with lifelong skills, "We are excited about this partnership as it has changed the way we do business here in Chilonga. The project has ensured that we are able to send our children to better schools than before. We have also received capacity building training from Tongaat Hulett enabling us to venture into cattle auctioning, livestock fattening projects as well as small scale dairy farming," he said.

The Chilonga Feedlot Project, bears testimony to Tongaat Hulett's ongoing commitment to partnering with relevant stakeholders to contribute to the upliftment of the rural communities that surround its operations through its SED initiatives.

