

School: Davidson College

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Fish farming for Economic Peace in Rural Rusape, Zimbabwe

This project seeks to improve the economic prospects of families and individuals in three villages of Shangwe resettlement area in Rusape, Zimbabwe. The three villages have a combined population of about 1000 men, women and children who depend completely on subsistence farming. There is no viable enterprise in any of the villages to improve the villagers' standards of living and to develop the area economically. I was raised in one of these villages, Village D and I know the plights of these villagers from experience. Due to Zimbabwe's ailing economy, the government's limited response to communities' needs, and the limited ability of the subsistence farmers to develop their community, the villagers have accepted limited clean water supply, poor sanitation, distant dilapidated education facilities, and an absent healthcare system as realities that they have to cope with. Virtually all villagers are unemployed save for the farming season when they take part in helping their families in preparing for the next year's food. A few other individuals offer their services at three nearby farms as manual laborers. The lack of income-generating projects to augment subsistence farming often leads both youths and adults to engage in illegal activities such as poaching from the nearby game reserves. This ability to poach for animals in the reserves is treated as a virtue since it provides food and income for many families. I am not proud to mention that I know of these illegal acts from close association with some of the people who did them, which is why I long for the villagers to have legal and sustainable means of obtaining food and income.

I am currently a junior at Davidson College where I am studying Chemistry with the hope of embarking on a medical career (MD-PhD) and offering medical service in developing countries as a physician-scientist. My experiences in the U.S have enabled me to reflect more on the plight of villagers in my hometown of Rusape. I have therefore developed a yearning to help the villagers in Rusape, some of whom are familiar people like family members, or friends that I frolicked with when we were young, but are now languishing under the burden of unemployment. **My goal in this project is to start a sustainable, community owned, and professionally managed fish farming project that will aid in bringing economic stability and peace to the villagers in rural Rusape.**

The desired project seeks to exploit the presence of a small underutilized dam located in Village D, Rusape. The project will be executed with the help of Aquaculture Zimbabwe, a Zimbabwean non-profit organization devoted to partnering with fish farmers in Zimbabwe.¹ The land on which to set up the fish ponds, close to the dam has been donated by the village headman. The plan is to set up an open pond culture with an initial capacity of ideally 12 tons of fish per year. Water will be pumped from the dam into a reservoir first then into the ponds. Rather than rechanneling the water back into the dam, the highly fertile water, due to fish droppings, will be integrated with the horticultural irrigation of a perennial community garden that will be established to help strengthen the community's food security.

This project is expected to be highly profitable, with projected profits of about \$20 000/year, since there is a ready market and no one else has a similar project in the area. This money will help to ease the economic woes of the villagers. Some of it will be devoted to the building of a centralized healthcare facility in the villages since currently there is none. The people employed in the project will come from the village thus the villagers will have some income that will prevent them from relying on illegal means like poaching for a survival. The fish from the project will be a perennial and secure food

source for the villagers who normally depend on seasonal farming so they will have less worry about irregular rain patterns that have been recently affecting their harvests. The profits will also be given to the villagers in the form of interest-less loans, which will help the villagers to start any other economic endeavors of their choice while also helping to ensure the sustainability of the project. I can foresee this project also helping with the retention of economically active individuals within the villages. Villagers often leave for the cities in search of employment. These usually include young mothers who leave their kids under the care of grandparents or fathers who leave wives and children alone at home in order to fend for the same. I thus yearn to have a chance to introduce this project so it will prevent the pain of living in a broken home since family members will have a reason to stay in the village.

I hope to start this project as soon as I get confirmation of the availability of the funds from the Kathryn W. Davis Projects for Peace grant. Aquaculture Zimbabwe has offered to start doing some groundwork in the village as soon as I am assured of the availability of the funds. The experts from Aquaculture Zimbabwe do not require any money for their service but I have to provide for their transport, which I included in the budget. Thus in mid-March they will go to the village to observe the site and start the design of the ponds that we will be building. They will also start to train the villagers on how to best manage the project during this period, and with the help of villagers, will start to clear up the land required for building the fish ponds. The technical training covers areas as fish nutrition and feed management, water quality management and other critical areas in successful aquaculture. Aquaculture Zimbabwe will be an important partner in this project since the goals of their non-profit organization broadly overlap with the goals that I have in this project, and they already have broad experience with working with villagers, donors and the Zimbabwean government. Aquaculture Zimbabwe will also provide one person who will be part of the village board that will be set up to help ensure sustainability, accountability, transparency and integrity of the project to the desired goals. The board will also ensure the day to day running of the project and will consult with the villagers on how to best use the funds from the project. I have also courted the services of a local accountant who has agreed to be part of the board. The other board members will be selected from the villagers, with the help of the villagers, in my first week of arrival in Zimbabwe.

My main role after I arrive in Zimbabwe will be to procure the resources needed to build the fish ponds. This will be done during the first week of the four weeks that I will be in Zimbabwe. I will be responsible for the buying of materials from the capital, Harare, and helping to transport them to Rusape. I already have an idea of where I will be getting the materials through the help that I have been receiving from Aquaculture Zimbabwe and some local contacts that I have. Once the resources are available I will spend the remaining weeks helping in the building of the fish ponds together with local villagers and the expert from Aquaculture Zimbabwe. The villagers that I have had a chance to communicate about the tentative project so far have expressed their interest in the project and their willingness to help in setting it up. I will not be available in Zimbabwe to see the first batch of fish being sold, but by the time I leave the country I hope that the project will be under the care of responsible individuals. Aquaculture Zimbabwe will also help to ensure the sustainability of the project by connecting the fish farmers to nearby markets and providing a business plan that the project can follow or learn from. My involvement with this project will not end once I leave Zimbabwe. I hope to continue to help to raise funds for the villagers, which will help in the infrastructural development of the mentioned villages. I thus hope that I will receive the Projects for Peace Grant without which economic peace will remain an elusive dream for the villagers in rural Rusape. Although my designed project exceeds the funds available through the Projects for Peace Grant, I am also applying for additional funding from my school's Center for Civic Engagement and Chaplain's office for additional funding.