

IT'S US AND IT'S NOW: WHATEVER THE QUESTION COMMUNITY IS THE ANSWER.



a co-creation of Kufunda, ORAP and TrustAfrica with a purpose to catalyze agency, enhance social cohesion, build healthy communities & contribute to reweaving the social fabric of Zimbabwe.



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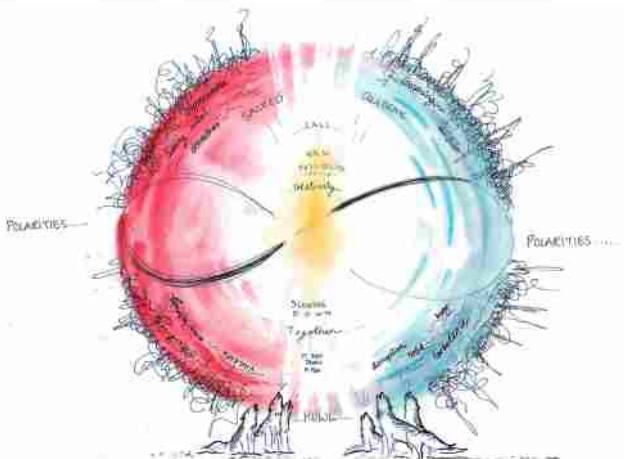
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As COVID-19 became more real to us in Zimbabwe in March 2020, our community of Conveners and thought partners in Gateway Zimbabwe leaned into the *Goethean nature observation* practice as a sensemaking tool. Thanks to [integrative thinker Johann Wolfgang von Goethe](#), this inquiry tool allows us to see emerging phenomena through careful, precise and direct observation of plants and the natural world. Over the past two years we've been learning about nature observation as a way to notice and make sense of social change; in our case transmuting observation of nature to the process of reweaving the social fabric of Zimbabwe. Amidst the uncertainty of this particular season, we embarked on a dedicated and collective practice of noticing “what is” and “what is emerging” as COVID-19 raged through the world. In Gateway Zimbabwe, this journey has simultaneously been a way of channeling and processing our own uncertainty, while locating the observations in a broader national and global sense.

Ten weeks later, our deep dive into nature observation has left us sitting with an initial set of poignant imagery around the polarities and tug-of-war at play between the new and the old. Within communities we are involved with, in the national landscape of Zimbabwe and all across the globe, where evolving the systems are being questioned and challenged.

Gateway Zimbabwe is a curious initiative, co-created by three very distinct organizations working in very interconnected domains: rights, social, cultural and ecological. These lenses, complemented by perspectives from thought partners in Zimbabwe, South Africa, and the US, have illuminated incredible richness about what this season of potential metamorphosis can offer. What is possible if we are able to remain fully awake to the extremes society and individuals are going through, to the pulling from all sides of systems (social, economic, political, cultural) becoming undone to become more whole and inclusive. As part of our observations we noticed many extremes. The tenderness of families becoming more intimate during Lockdown. Communities from across our fellowship program in Zimbabwe returning to the land to find sustenance and boost their immune systems by building community gardens. And at the same time, we were aware of the turbulent reality of the daily wage earners struggling between the threat of death and the threat of starvation. The violent (and sometimes deadly) response in enforcing measures that were intended to preserve life. And the self-focused preservation of personal rights at the expense of others, despite a call for community accountability.

In Gateway Zimbabwe, we know that new ways are possible. And so, we follow our instincts and search for pathways through the cycle of polarities that seems to pull across our society. Whether we are using participatory circle practices or deep democracy dialogical practices to bring community leaders together in generative & inclusive ways; whether we are composting and drawing lessons from how working with the land is akin to the work of tending diligently & thoughtfully to our communities. Our quest is the same: to notice the multiple gateways for the new that becomes possible in each moment and each movement. The choice to remain on a journey of searching, learning and inquiring is just as important as arriving at a destination or a particular eureka moment. We know that this journey is going to be a long one and is not finite. And yet, even in this short space of time, there is a notable observation which has reminded us of some essence of humanity.





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# #CommunityIsTheAnswer



**Community, community, community.** We've been struck again by how community building has to be at the centre of everything we do. As terms like social distancing, community infections and community immunity became more normalized, we were drawn more to the POWER OF COMMUNITY. Whether we are working for greater democracy, catalyzing local economies, building ecologically friendly latrines, or working with communities to grow sorghum. Without the process of letting people vision together and co-create the journey together as a community, these efforts are watered down in their potential to reweave the social fabric of society.

During this COVID-19 lockdown period in Zimbabwe, we've seen this deep community building across our Gateway fellowship: as they notice important lessons from the compost pile, as our Chiadzwa cohort keeps dialogue alive despite our physical distancing, and as our Epworth cohort looks to community buying as a way to survive & develop a sustainable and self-determined micro-economy. Read more from these stories below.



The Gateway Zimbabwe community at Kufunda Village has been working on a biodynamic garden project for the past 18 months. The garden has been a means of feeding the community and there are also plans to begin a weekly veggie basket scheme, selling and delivering the fresh organic produce to Harare residents. It is also used as a teaching and demonstration place for the neighbouring community.

Biodynamic gardening and farming is an alternative agricultural practice, quite similar to organic farming, with the use of manures and composts, excluding any use of artificial fertilizers on the soil. It goes one step further in its use of biodynamic preparations – a form of herbal remedy - to enrich the compost and the soil. It takes an almost spiritual approach to how the soil, plants and livestock are treated as a single, interdependent unit and the intention of the biodynamic practices are to "restore, maintain and enhance ecological harmony".

Biodynamic agriculture was inspired by integrative thinker [Rudolf Steiner](#) (1861 - 1925) and works with the rhythmic processes of life. Each farm is a unique organism in which each part serves the whole. The whole is made up of factors that lie beyond most conventional farming: including cosmic rhythms and the soil as a digestive organ of the plant. To bring these aspects together Steiner introduced the biodynamic preparations which make use of substances from the natural world that are exposed to natural forces and feed back into nature enriched. They are remedies for the earth (soil and plants).

Through the fellowship program, Gateway Zimbabwe has made use of the principles of biodynamic agriculture as a way to learn and teach deeper life lessons about society and how we co-exist with one another in our communities. During the Fellowship Modules, for example, the garden is used as a place where everyone comes together to work on CPP – Cow

Pit Pat, which is a special compost made primarily from cow manure. The preparation process for CPP requires a kneading by hand, or using the feet, so the groups are encouraged to work as a unit, singing and at times dancing in the manure, building a spirit of oneness among them. It's quite a cathartic process.



One of the Gateway Zimbabwe fellows speaks fondly about her recent experience making compost:

"I will always cherish the memories of the compost-making that I learnt at Gateway. The comparison I was taught about the compost vis-a-vis the people whom I live within the community; how different they are from each other and the difference between the contents that make the compost. What interests me most is the organic fertility that is produced from different contents that are used when making the compost; some applies to the good results and production that is produced when communities come together despite their differences, even in their own diversity."





In Zimbabwe, despite over 60% internet penetration level, the cost of data bundles and quality of connectivity make access to the exciting online platforms cropping up as a response to COVID-19, not as feasible for many here. And yet, important meetings and discussion can't wait for lockdown to end. That's why we are inspired by the Gateway Zimbabwe Fellowship cohort in Chiadzwa who are making use of the platforms available to them, and organising weekly Whatsapp "seminars", in partnership with the Zimbabwe Diamonds and Allied Workers Union (ZIDAWU).

The virtual dialogue series started when the group realised that the Covid-19 induced lockdown restrictions would prevent them from carrying out their activities. Their work involves a lot of traveling and physical interaction between communities and the lockdown movement restrictions meant that it might come to a complete halt.

Instead of grumbling over losing their usual mobility and physical contact with communities, they asked themselves "What CAN we do? What do we have available to us, where we are?"

Drawing from lessons learnt at Gateway during Nature Observation exercises, like how a plant adapts and responds to changes in the environment for example, they also decided to adapt and explore the available alternatives and possibilities. The decision of using the most popular social media app in Zimbabwe was reached and what has happened since can only be described as PHENOMENAL.

The Whatsapp dialogues, where presenters post audio messages – or "voice notes", followed by question and answer sessions, now have an average attendance of 160 people and the numbers keep rising. Participants include young people, elders, traditional leaders, professionals, community monitors, government officials...all joining in from the comfort of their homes or private offices

Some of the topics that have been discussed during the dialogue sessions include:

- *Challenges faced by different groups within the community, such as women and children, during the Covid-19 pandemic;*
- *How are we responding to climate change during the time of the Covid-19 pandemic?*
- *Mineral resource management by local authorities and communities;*
- *How can we maintain our culture, especially the use of traditional herbs and medicines?*
- *How can we reweave the social fabric of Zimbabwe?*

The discussions have been very exciting and engaging, with lively participation from those who follow and attend them. Positive feedback and results have emerged, including a Ministry of Mines official reaching out, wanting to assist groups of women in the community to obtain mining claims.

The popularity of the dialogue sessions has shown the resilience of grassroots communities in a time of isolation and the challenges brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic. Their work is very much continuing and it is a wonderful model, inclusive of both urban and rural communities, as most people have access to Whatsapp on their mobile phones. Another advantage of this model is that participants can still access the voice notes and written notes long after the engagement session, if they could not get on at that time because of battery, limited data or network challenges or if they were otherwise occupied. These are some of the challenges of using other virtual seminar platforms that have been cited by rural communities.

The success of this initiative has inspired other Gateway Fellows to take on that model of engagement in a time when we can't meet physically for modules and check-ins. Vibrant discussions have begun among the Gateway Fellows, who in turn, are adopting the same concept in their local communities as well.



*It is wild  
It is a gateway to the creative and  
generative  
It is allowing the silenced a voice  
It is peace and healing  
It is called Gateway  
You are igniting passion  
You are our new language  
You are the children and their  
laughter  
You are our abundant Zimbabwe  
I am dawn after a long dark night  
I am an exploration of everything  
you are  
I am helping you learn how to fly  
again  
I am here - I am patient  
My name is **Gateway Zimbabwe***

In January 2018 we met as the convening organizations and along with key thought partners we did a shortened Pantoum Process (a longer poetic exercise) from which this poem was birthed collectively. And so we became Gateway Zimbabwe.

**Bravo, Chiadzwa Gateway Fellows!**



Above: Some of the flyers which have been distributed digitally, inviting community members to join Dialogue Sessions.



## SAVING OUR COMMUNITY BY SAVING WITH OUR COMMUNITY!

Our Gateway Fellow from the Epworth Cohort has been working on an initiative to break the cycle of poverty among its residents. In his ward, there are around sixty households, each with an average of five family members, living on contested land in an extremely economically marginalised reality. The main source of income for many of these residents, especially during the lockdown, has been gathering and selling firewood and thatching grass to neighbouring suburbs. This has resulted in massive levels of deforestation in the area, where spaces that were once covered by thick forest are now bare and barren, stripped of most vegetation.

This particular Gateway Fellow, has worked on initiatives to build sustainable communities elsewhere, and says “The lockdown made me have to work within my immediate community, as I could no longer travel...where I normally operate from.”

He says during this time, he began to look around his own community, observing consumption patterns and how the current means of generating income were having adverse effects on the environment. He also observed how much those around him were constantly struggling financially. In an analogy, he compared the economy to the blood flowing through the human body system. He likened his community to a limb that is deprived of this vital lifeblood, which inevitably becomes and remains weak and ineffective. It was clear to him that a solution was needed and he knew that the community had to work together to find that solution on its own.

“The pandemic taught us that if we are not organised, we will always cry foul. Organisation is key.” By organisation, he means that the community needs to co-create and register legal entities that can be run professionally. They would register themselves as a trust or a cooperative, set up a community-owned shop or enterprise and use this as an economic pivoting point for themselves.

He calls it the Community Economic Development Life-Cycle Initiative, which involves three steps. The first step, he says, is to sensitise the community on the contentious issues of their present consumption trends. He needs to help residents see that destroying their



environment as a means to survive is undesirable and encourage residents to find alternative and more sustainable sources of income.

The second step is to mobilise the community to come together and start a community-owned enterprise. The Gateway Zimbabwe Fellow has already started engaging community members and has been quite successful, with a number of them pledging support for the project by putting in a commitment fee, starting from one dollar per person, accumulating to a \$5 once-off commitment fee.. Others are still slowly coming forward, as and when they are able to make enough money from their work as informal traders and casual labourers, which has been greatly affected by the advent of the Covid-19 crisis. But those who cannot afford to make this contribution, as is the case with a majority of residents, make up for the fee through their commitment in buying from the community shop.

We are taking Ubuntu to the next level and reclaiming our sense of wealth. The current capitalist economic trends have reduced us into consumers, living from hand to mouth. That lifestyle has deprived us of self-determination.”

The group that made initial contributions came up with a list of about twenty commonly used commodities. At the beginning of June, they used the money they had put together to buy these basic commodities in bulk, to stock up their “shop” – operating from one of their colleagues' home, which the rest of the community now buys from. This act of saving from collective consumption will lead to self-determination, improved food security and with that the community members enjoy better nutritional health.

The third step of the cycle involves using the savings from the shop as a resource pool for next level of investments. At this stage they will look at the viable opportunities within the community. Those who want to venture into any form of business that they are passionate about, will get investment from the community fund. One idea is to invest in the children's education, by setting up a local TV school, where teachers will record lessons for the children to access on television, so that they are able to continue with their home-schooling until it is safe for them to return to school.

Many other project ideas are being considered, especially those that will bring essential skills and services to be available to the community, being given by other community members whom they will have assisted to set up their businesses, using their collective savings.





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“Our communities are rich, in terms of skills and talents, passion,” says Gateway Zim Fellow. “Taking advantage of technology and using social media platforms, we will create network marketing and network trading.” Doing business amongst themselves, goods and services will be exchanged within the community, which means minimal movement, in compliance with the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown restrictions. The money will circulate within the community and consumption can be used as an asset, no longer as an expenditure. The collective savings can be used to invest in the community's common goals.



Some of the community members. They make a living from selling firewood and thatch , neither of which are are eco-friendly, sustainable or very profitable.

This Gateway Zim Fellow believes that his model can bring about economic progress and equity to his community and can easily be replicated throughout other communities in the Gateway Zimbabwe network. We already knew it, but COVID-19 has emphasized the need for more inclusive and sustainable economic models. At Gateway Zimbabwe, we are proud to provide catalytic support to initiatives such as these. These are the seeds of the future sprouting as communities reclaim their agency and co-create the reality they want.

# LOOK OUT FOR THE GATEWAY ZIMBABWE WEBSITE LAUNCHING ON MONDAY 24 AUGUST

[www.gatewayzimbabwe.org](http://www.gatewayzimbabwe.org)

